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MEDITATIONS
AND
CONTEMPLATIONS

ON
THE SUFFERINGS

OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST;

IN WHICH
THE HISTORY OF THE PASSION,
AS GIVEN BY THE FOUR EVANGELISTS,
IS CONNECTED, HARMONISED, & EXPLAINED,

WITH SUITABLE PRAYERS AND OFFICES OF DEVOTION.

BY J. RAMBACH, D. D.
LATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GIESSEN.

IN THREE PARTS,
CONTAINING,

- I. The Sufferings of CHRIST in the Garden, and before the Spiritual Court of the Jews.
 - II His Sufferings before the Civil Tribunal of Pilate and Herod.
 - III. His Sufferings on Mount Golgotha.
-

First American Edition,

FROM THE LAST LONDON EDITION,

TRANSLATED

FROM THE GERMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

THE history of the Sufferings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, has met with the approbation of the devout Christian among every nation, people, and kindred. To render this history more useful, Dr. Rambach, professor of the University of Halle, near 100 years ago, harmonised and connected this history into its present form.

THE work being alike distant from religious disputation, as well as political opinion, may be read with advantage by the pious of every denomination; instrumental, and savingly beneficial to those, who read with faith and prayer.

THE Publisher would beg leave only to remark, that as nature furnishes the individual here to his utmost wish, that as the jurisprudence of our country protects virtue and deters vice beyond that of any other; so, like the sun, this great man's Considerations, on so divine a subject, are procured from about six thousand miles to the east of our metropolis, to diffuse spiritual consolation and advice to the several flocks of a well directed, learned, and pious clergy.

THE
AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

CANDID READER,

I HERE present you with “ Considerations on the History of the Sufferings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

In the year 1721, I expounded the “ Account of the internal sufferings of Christ in the garden,” to a great number of students, in the time set apart for that exercise in Lent. After a short illustration of the historical circumstances, I drew from them some inferences, which I enlarged upon; and inculcated on the minds of my pupils agreeably to the circumstances of the audience. In Lent 1722, I discoursed on the “ Account of the external sufferings of Christ in the garden.” Many of my hearers, having signified their earnest desire to read in print what I had delivered to them on this subject, I judged it proper to comply with their request; and in the very same year, I committed both treatises to the press.

Though such an imperfect sketch met with a very kind reception, and though I received many exhortations to continue the work; I was thoroughly determined in myself to leave the continuance of it to abler pens. In the mean time, I received a call from *Jena* to *Halle*; and there I found a desirable opportunity for illustrating the other parts of our Saviour's sufferings, in a public practical lecture which I was appointed to hold every Saturday. I therefore set apart some of the above mentioned lectures for the “ Considerations on the history of the sufferings of Christ before the ecclesiastical court of the Jews;” and those considerations, after I had re-

vised and enlarged them, I published in the years 1728 and 1729. These were soon followed by the "Sufferings of Jesus before Pilate and Herod;" and in 1730, by the "Sufferings of our blessed Lord on Mount Golgotha." Thus I have given the reader a brief account of this work.

As to the method I have observed in treating on this subject, it is as follow :

1. The ground work of the CONSIDERATIONS is an account of our Saviour's Passion, given by the four Evangelists, which I have endeavoured to harmonise and connect together. To every part of the history of the Passion is prefixed the several texts thus harmonised ; and at the beginning of each CONSIDERATION, the part which is there treated of is repeated, and the Evangelists, from whom it is taken, quoted. In the last volume, the foundation of the IV. IX. XII. and XIII. CONSIDERATIONS is laid in certain types and prophecies out of the Old Testament, concerning the sufferings of the Messiah.

2. The harmonised text is divided into paragraphs, for the sake of perspicuity and order, in the discussion of each particular.

3. These larger paragraphs are afterwards, according to the succession of circumstances, divided into smaller ; and each of the latter are explained in their order.

4. It was not my intention to enter on a diffuse and critical exposition of every particular circumstance of the history of the Passion, or to undertake the solution of every difficulty : The text, however, is sufficiently illustrated, sometimes in a concise manner, and sometimes more at large ; the energy of the principal words in the original is pointed out ; the difficulties in some measure removed by observations on the counsel of the Divine wisdom, and the right of Divine retaliation.

5. From the texts thus illustrated are deduced several practical doctrines; some of which naturally flow from the import of the words of the text, and others contain useful observations on the same. Some are adapted for admonition and reproof, some for encouragement, and others for consolation under afflictions. Some are suited to the circumstances of Christians in general; others are more particularly adapted to the academic state. Some appear to contain only moral precepts; but these are improved, and, as it were, interwoven with the very essence of Christianity. The end and design of many of them is to display the resemblance between Christ and his members in the mystery of the Cross, and to represent the true state and condition of the world which still lies buried in wickedness.

6. To each CONSIDERATION is annexed a short prayer, in order to instruct those, who are unacquainted with mental prayer, how they may lift up their hearts to God in devout ejaculations at the end of every CONSIDERATION.

If the reader, according to Luther's instructions, from the manifold sufferings of Christ, considers the abomination of sin, and the greatness of God's displeasure against the wickedness of man; and in this mirror of sin and wrath continues surveying himself till, by a sense of a godly sorrow and solitary contrition, his conscience is brought to the fellowship of his Saviour's sufferings, and sin be absolutely mortified, he will reap unspeakable benefit by this mean performance.

On the other hand, if he seeks relief to a troubled conscience, by the consideration of the transcendent love of the suffering Redeemer to mankind; if he looks on Jesus as the propitiation for his sins, and applies to himself, by faith and repentance, the obedience of Christ exemplified in his sufferings, as a friendly veil for his disobedience and imperfections;

if by the same medium he lays hold on the meritorious satisfaction of Christ, and humbly implores forgiveness of his sins at the Throne of Grace in consideration of that satisfaction, he will not lose his labour in the perusal of these sheets.

Lastly, if he gives himself up soul and body to our crucified Saviour, as his property, purchased by his precious blood ; and desires, by the help of his Holy Spirit, to be inspired with a willingness and ability to imitate those Divine virtues manifested in the sufferings of Christ, especially his patience, meekness, and humility, he will by no means lose his reward.

May the crucified Jesus, who is now glorified and exalted to the right hand of God grant, that every one who reads this work may make such a blessed use of it, that his glorious name may be praised to all eternity ! May the great Saviour cause the truth set forth in these sheets to be fertile seeds, which may abundantly produce the fruits of righteousness, and grow up to their desired maturity ! May we all be powerfully awakened by these Considerations to a lively faith in his name, and an earnest desire to imitate so bright an example.

To the immaculate Lamb that was slain, who by his grace enabled me to prosecute this work be ascribed praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever. Amen.

J. RAMBACH.

HALLE, Feb. 24, 1730.

P A R T I.
OF THE
INTERNAL SUFFERINGS
OF
CHRIST

IN THE GARDEN, AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

The accounts given by the four Evangelists, (Matt. xxvi. 36—46. Mark xiv. 32—42. Luke xxii. 40—46. John xviii. 1, 2.) connected and harmonised.

“ THEN cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, where was a garden, into which Jesus and his disciples entered. But Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus oft-times resorted thither with his disciples.

“ And when he was come into the garden, he said to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

“ And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, James, and John, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. And Jesus said unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me.

“ And he went a little farther, and was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and fell on his face on the ground, and prayed, 'That, if it were possible the hour might pass from him.

“ And he said, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

“ And he cometh to his disciples, and findeth them asleep; and he saith to Peter: Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch with me one hour? Watch

ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : The spirit indeed is willing ; but the flesh is weak.

“ And he went away again the second time, and prayed, and spake the same words : O my Father ! if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again ; for their eyes were heavy, neither wist they what to answer him.

“ And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words : Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly ; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

“ And when he rose up from prayer, and came to his disciples the third time, he found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said unto them,* Will ye yet sleep, and take your rest ? Why sleep ye ? Behold the hour is come ; and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go ! Lo ! he that betrayeth me is at hand. Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

A PREPARATORY PRAYER.

LORD Jesus ! the author and finisher of our faith, who didst endure the pains of the cross, and embrace sorrow, when thou mightest have reigned in joy ; blessed and eternal praise be to thee for thy free love, which moved thee, in our stead, to enter on the field of battle, and to obtain a glorious victory, the benefit of which all thy spiritual Israel might partake.

.....
* The author has very judiciously rendered this sentence interrogatively ; whereas the *English* translation makes it very flat, ‘ sleep on now, and take your rest,’ as if it was a time to sleep when they and their master were in imminent danger. *W.*

Illuminate our eyes; that they may be capable of rightly discerning the mysteries of the internal agonies of thy soul, with which thou hast pleaded our cause before the tribunal of the supreme justice. May our thoughts be so penetrated with the divine flames of thy endless love, that our stony hearts may be thoroughly warmed and softened. Grant this for the sake of that transcendent love of thine. Amen.



CONSIDERATION I.

THE SCENE OF THE INTERNAL SUFFERINGS
OF JESUS CHRIST; MATTHEW XXVI. 36.

MARK XIV. 32. JOHN XVIII. 1, 2.

“THEN cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, where was a garden, into which Jesus and his disciples entered. But Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus oft-times resorted thither with his disciples.”

These words contain a summary account,

First, Of the place where Christ entered upon his spiritual conflict; and,

Secondly, Of the company who attended him thither.

I. The place was a farm or country-house at the foot of the Mount of Olives, called Gethsemane, either from the oil-presses in which the olives growing in the adjacent grounds were pressed, or from the fatness of the soil, and fertility of the valley. As the singular providence of God directed all our Saviour's sufferings, and the most minute circumstances attending them; so may it be reasonably supposed that it was not a mere matter of chance, that, his internal sufferings happened in this place.

It was, first, a valley at the foot of a mountain, and consequently a proper theatre for Christ's deepest humiliation to be exhibited on. When our

blessed Saviour intended to manifest his glory to some of his disciples, he led them up on a high mountain (Matth. xvii. 1.;) but now, as the same disciples were to be witnesses of his lowest abasement, he retires with them to an obscure deep valley. In the former case, the nature of the thing required, that it should be represented on an elevated conspicuous place; in the latter, a lowly valley bore the greatest analogy to the transaction; for in this instance, the Son of God descends from the high summit of his divine majesty into the valley of the lowest abasement. When he was to be glorified, he chose to be nearer heaven, the true seat of glory; when he humbles himself, he chose to descend on the earth, that he might expiate the presumptuous crime of our first parents which they committed on earth, and also to set to the inhabitants thereof an example of true lowliness and humiliation. In the Old Testament, the most glorious manifestations of the Divine presence were displayed on high mountains. The law was given on the summit of a hill; on a mountain God exhibited to the view of Moses the land of Canaan, and on a mountain God made himself known to Elijah; but here the most solemn manifestation of God's holiness, justice, and love to mankind in the sufferings of his Son, is transacted in a low depressed valley. Who will now presume to say that the Lord is only a 'God of the hills, and not of the plains and valleys?' (1 Kings xx. 28.) For now the transcendent glory of the Lord is manifested also in a valley, though covered under the gloomy veil of sufferings. Now we may be assured, that 'neither height nor depth can separate us from the love of God' (Rom. viii. 34.) Christ has sanctified both the one and the other; the blessed Jesus hath consecrated heights and depths. So that if God brings us into the low valley of an abject state; if our way

to eternal bliss lies 'through the vale of tears,' (Psal. lxxxiv. 7.) let us consider that the blessed feet of our Lord and Saviour have trodden the dreary path before us.

Secondly, It was the 'valley of oil or of fatness.' This circumstance was likewise directed by the hand of God; and the place may now justly deserve that name, since He entered it who 'was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows;' (Psal. xv. 8.) though, for a time he emptied himself here of the sensible effects of this 'oil of gladness,' to procure it again for the human race. This rich and fertile valley is a type of the spiritual fertility, which was to be the consequence of Christ's passion; even in the accursed soil of the Pagans, till then productive only of thorns and thistles. Now shall 'the wilderness and the solitary place be glad, and the desert shall rejoice.' (Isaiah xxxv. 1.) Now the sterile heart of man, being manured by the blood of Christ, shall bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

But, thirdly, the place where Christ's spiritual sufferings commenced is still more particularly specified, by the addition, that it was a garden; which appears to have belonged to the farm and adjoining to it. If it was not by accident that the sufferings of Christ began in a valley, much less was it without a divine appointment, that they began and ended in a garden; began in this, his conflict with death, and ended in his burial, which was performed in a garden. By this means, unquestionably, the Divine wisdom takes us, as it were, by the hand, and leads our thoughts to the garden of Eden, the place of our unhappy fall. It was but fit that in such a place where, by sin, we had alienated ourselves from God, that important transaction, by which the door to a communion with him was to be again opened to us should begin. Where the curse was first denounced, there the foundation for obtaining the blessing was to be

laid. Where sin first entered into the world, there also was it first to be expiated.

Another circumstance, very observable in the history of Christ's sufferings, is the justice of Divine retaliation; for the satisfaction of Christ was to be attended with circumstances similar to those of the first fall, which are also incidental to other sins. Now, a part of divine retaliation is, that God often punishes the sins of man at the very same place where they were committed. Thus Samson's eyes were put out at Gaza, (Judges xvi. 21.) where he had made a wrong use of them in unchaste looks and lascivious glances. (Judges xvi. 1.) The dogs licked up Ahab's blood on the spot, where he had shed the blood of Naboth; (1 Kings xxi. 19. xxii. 38.) and the same thing may be here observed in the vicarious punishment of our great representative. In a garden we had presumptuously sinned; and in a garden is our blessed Lord punished for our sin.

What wanton scenes of dalliance and ebriety are often exhibited in gardens, during the heat of summer, under the secret covert of guilty shades! Never should a serious Christian set his foot in a garden without calling to mind the severe agonies, which Christ suffered in the fatal garden of Gethsemane.

But again, this garden is further described as a place often frequented by Christ and his disciples, and likewise well known to the perfidious traitor. Concerning the first it is said, 'Jesus oft times resorted hither with his disciples;' so that this was the place whither he usually retired with his disciples, when he was inclined to be in a calm solitude. And, without doubt, the owner of this farm was a cordial friend to our blessed Lord, and received him at his house with singular pleasure; since, otherwise, our Saviour would not have intruded himself an unwelcome guest. Hence we may learn the following truths;

1. Where the Lord Jesus is cordially entertained, there he delights to be. He is a most kind, loving friend, and easy to be intreated. In him is no moroseness, no austerity or haughtiness. The way to gain his favour and friendship is always open, 'for his delight is in the children of men.' (Prov. viii. 31.) 'How he loveth the people!' (Deut. xxx. 3.) Men are often fickle, and take pleasure in change; but he is ever constant and unchangeable in his friendship. What he forbade his disciples to do, viz. 'Ye shall not go from one house to another,' (Luke x. 7.) he himself does by no means practise. Where he has once entered, he does not willingly leave the place: Let us therefore give up our hearts to be a perpetual abode for such an amiable guest.

2. The nearer the hour of suffering approaches, the more closely ought we to associate ourselves with the children of God. The Lord Jesus, before this crisis, used to pray alone; and for that purpose usually fixed on some solitary place in a desert, or on a mountain apart; (Matt. xiv. 22, 23. Luke vi. 12.) but on the days immediately preceding his passion, when he did not pass the night in Jerusalem, he frequently resorted, with his disciples, to this place; without doubt, in order to pray and prepare himself for the sufferings and the pangs of death, which were then approaching. Hereby he has likewise sanctified, to his members, this communion in prayer, and recommended and established it by his great example.

Another particular mentioned of this field of conflict was, that it was known to the traitor. 'But Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place.' This is taken notice of by St. John, on purpose to obviate any surmise, that Jesus went into the garden with a view of concealing himself, and flying from the face of danger. But the case was far otherwise: at this time he made choice of a known place with which

the betrayer was well acquainted. This is a proof of the willing cheerfulness with which Christ entered on his sufferings, and is truly an important point to be laid to heart in the history of our Saviour's passion. Judas knew the place; but Christ was also sensible that the traitor did know it. He might very easily have chosen for this recess some other unknown place: but his exceeding love to us carried him to the very place which his betrayer was acquainted with. Thus did he go, like a harmless lamb to the slaughter, to meet his unrelenting murderers. Here the following observations naturally offer themselves.

1. It is also one of the chief points of Christ's sufferings, that one of his intimate friends, who had eaten of his bread, lifted up his heel against him. As the prophecies were fulfilled (Psal. xli. 10. and lv. 14.) in this circumstance, so the justice of retaliation eminently shews itself. Our first unhappy fall was preceded by the most flagitious perfidy; as man, the intimate friend and guest of God, violated his fidelity and allegiance to his indulgent Creator. This is implied in every wilful sin, God being thereby trampled under foot by those miscreants who every day eat his bread. To atone for this, the blessed Jesus permitted such an afflictive incident to happen to him, which, we have reason to conclude, gave occasion to many severe and opprobrious reflections from his inveterate enemies. Now it may be seen, said they, what manner of person this Jesus of Nazareth is; his very disciples and followers come and offer him to sale. But this incident is still not unfrequent in the church of God, where his faithful servants and dear children are often betrayed by those, whom they have treated with the greatest confidence and affection. However, he has sanctified this calamity in the sacred person of Christ. But we may here justly say, 'Woe to him by whom Christ is betrayed in his members.'

2. One single sin, when deeply rooted in the heart, may be productive of many other heinous crimes. Judas was extremely covetous. This induced him to be continually embezzling and concealing part of what he received. (John xii. 6.) This, by long practice, became a habit ; by which the love of money increased to such a degree in him, that at last he sold his Lord and master for an inconsiderable sum. Oh, that by this detestable example we may be rendered wise and cautious ! Satan does not always make use of seven cords to bind a soul (Judges xvi. 8.) for destruction. One alone is sufficient for his purpose. The bulk of mankind unhappily suppose, that if they do not live in all the works of the flesh, they are safe : though they indulge a small favourite sin, which they think cannot be of much consequence. Alas ! Judas, to his unspeakable grief, found the contrary to be true. All the sins recorded of him are avarice and theft ; but these cost him his life and eternal salvation.

This was the chain in which Satan bound the unhappy Judas. One he entangles with the snare of intemperance, another he captivates with ambition, a third with voluptuousness and secret impurity, &c. but he leads them all to utter ruin and perdition, unless a sincere conversion and repentance intervenes. This should animate us to cast off the chains of the devil, and to prostrate ourselves at the feet of the blessed Jesus, with prayer and intercession, that he would loose the bonds of sin, before ‘ we are fast bound in misery and iron.’

3. The Lord Jesus hath also sanctified this kind of suffering which his children are exposed to, when their religious private assemblies are known to treacherous persons. Here our Lord was to permit, that the place to which he resorted should be known to Judas, and by his means, to the chief priests and the scribes. It is not improbable that his enemies thus

reasoned among themselves, "Who knows what dangerous plot this Jesus may be contriving there with his disciples; some insurrection or revolt may be ripe for execution. It is high time to put a stop to those clandestine meetings." Such undeserved suspicions did the Lord Jesus, for the benefit of his dear children, submit to; and was contented, that the place of his assembling with his disciples should be known to his perfidious betrayer. This species of suffering often occurs in the history of David, who, in his sufferings and distresses, was a true type of our Saviour. When he thought himself quite safe at Nob, he was betrayed by the insidious Doeg.—(1 Sam. xxii. 9.) When he lay concealed on mount Hachilah, the treacherous Zephites discovered him to Saul, (1 Sam. xxvi. 1. Psalm liv. 2.) so that he wishes for 'the wings of a dove, that he might fly away and be at rest;' (Psalm lv. 6.) being every where sold, ejected, and betrayed. Now, to a Christian, it is a great consolation under such sufferings, that this was the case even with his Lord and Master.

II. Here also are specified the companions, who attended our blessed Saviour to his place of combat. Jesus, indeed, was the chief person in this transaction; and of him it is also expressly said, (Matt. xxvi. 36.) 'Then cometh Jesus,' the supreme 'messenger of the heavenly father'. He comes himself; does not send an angel or any of his followers in his stead; for, in the affair in question; no created being could supply his place, and fulfil the arduous task. He himself appears in his own adorable person, and fulfils the word which had long since been spoken by the mouth of David, 'Lo, I come, oh my God, to do thy will!' (Psalm xl. 8. 9.) But it is very observable that St. Matthew describes this important transaction as if he still saw him present before his eyes, 'Then cometh Jesus,' as he formerly, almost in the same manner, described his coming to baptism,

which was a type of his suffering, 'Then cometh Jesus to John, &c.' (John iii. 13.) This circumstance affords us the following considerations :

1. The actions of our Saviour, particularly his procession to his ignominious death, should always be present before our eyes. We should never be tired of reflecting on the sufferings of Christ as a story of little consequence ; but should continually find new strength, comfort, courage, and incitements to our duty in all the weary steps which his blessed feet have trod for our salvation. How is it possible that we can commit any wilful sin, if we continually set before our eyes Christ's mournful progress to a painful, accursed death. -

2. In our meditation on the whole history of the passion, our eyes must be continually fixed on Jesus as the principal figure in the representation.— In this passage many persons are concerned, every one of whom acts with propriety his respective part ; but amidst the group, we are never to lose sight of Jesus. When we come to make a faithful application of the sufferings of Christ, Judas and the high-priest, Herod and Pontius Pilate, must be in a manner lost to us ; so that, like the disciples at the transfiguration of our Lord, we may have our Lord and Saviour alone in view. (Matt. xvii. 8.) However, though Jesus be the chief of those who came into this garden, yet is he attended by the small company of disciples. It is true they go with him, but it is only as witnesses and spectators of his sufferings. They are only to observe the severe agonies of his soul, that they may with the greatest certainty and confidence be witnesses of his sufferings. How wide the difference here between the Leader and his companions ! Christ went voluntarily into the garden in obedience to his Almighty Father, out of love and tenderness to mankind, animated with a divine strength to over-

come his sufferings. His disciples were all weakness, drowsiness, and torpitude, and fluctuating betwixt temerity and fear; so that such companions were rather a burden than an alleviation to his sorrow. However, they were to accompany their Lord; though no calamity was to befall them at that time. Hence we may learn,

1. That God gradually inures his children who are weak to the cross; and frequently lets them see, for a time, the conflicts of others, before they themselves are stationed in the field of battle. So tenderly does the Lord Jesus deal with weak and feeble souls, and so wisely does he proportion the load of their strength; for he requires not of them any more than they can bear. May this consideration sink deep in the minds of those whom a dread of the Cross keeps aloof from the true spirit of Christianity! But happy is he, who makes a right use of such preludes in the ascetic school of our Lord's sufferings; and so attends to the fidelity and end of other Christian champions as to follow their faith, (Heb. xiii. 7.) that when he is called upon, he may also be ready to fight the good fight, and come off with conquest and renown. (1 Tim. i. 6, 12. 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.)

2. In following the Lord Jesus, we are to fit and prepare ourselves for a participation of his sufferings. This is pointed out to us by the Holy Ghost in these words, 'cometh Jesus with his disciples.' When we acknowledge Christ and what he has suffered for us, our resolution must be, 'Let us also go that we may die with him!' (John xi. 16.) Therefore we are not to be backward or unwilling when our master shall lead us to the mount of Olives. We must follow the Lamb of God wheresoever he goeth. If we would be his true disciples, we must prepare ourselves in his school for such difficult lessons, and, with St. Paul, 'desire to know him—and the fellowship

of his sufferings, that we may be conformable to his death.' (Phil. iii. 10.)

THE PRAYER.

OH most faithful Saviour! all praise be to thee for thine infinite love, which induced thee, in thine own glorious and adorable person, to undergo that painful progress on which our redemption depends; and to retire to the garden of Gethsemane, there to expiate the sins which we, by our first parent, Adam, had committed in the garden of Eden. Grant us grace, that this thy bloody and agonizing walk may ever be fresh and recent in our minds. Be pleased to inspire us with a willingness to go with thee wherever thou leadest the way,—Preserve us evermore from such a temper as, is ashamed of the ignominy of thy Cross. If our flesh should prove weak and reluctant, draw it after thee with the gentle cords of thy love, that we may not remain behind nor loiter in the thorny way to rest, which lies through sorrows and sufferings. Be also one day our guide through the gloomy vale of death, and animate and support us at our last place of combat. Grant that we may acquit ourselves courageously, and press forward to thee through life and death. Be ever merciful and propitious to us, O Lord. Amen.



CONSIDERATION II.

CHRIST'S FIRST ADDRESS TO HIS DISCIPLES.

AND when he was come into the garden, he said to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. Pray, that ye enter not into temptation. (Matt. xxvi. 36. Mark xiv. 32. Luke xxii. 40.)

These words exhibit to us two circumstances :

First, The presence of Christ at the place of conflict.

Secondly, His discourse to his disciples.

I. The presence of Christ on his place of trial and conflict is described by St. Luke in these remarkable words, 'When he was at the place;' i. e. when he was as one arrived at the place of combat.

In the former consideration is shewn only, that Jesus was come with his disciples into the garden; but now he is actually in it: he is now on the spot where, by his Father's appointment, the Son was to drink of the cup of mental agony. Here something extraordinary was to be exhibited: the Son of Man was here to become a worm, the Creator to be lower than the creature, and the source of all consolation to be exhausted of every comfort. The amazing change which this glorious person was to undergo, is most emphatically expressed in the Greek original: (Luke xxii. 44.) 'And being in an agony.' (Gal. iii. 13. iv. 4. Phil. ii. 7, 8.) It was that we might no longer be what we were before, namely, sinners, rebels, enemies of God, and children of wrath, that Christ suffereth this. It was in our stead he became a victim; in our stead trod the dreary path of grief and anguish, that we might tread the place of joy, triumph, and exultation. Hence we may learn the following particulars.

1. A true follower of Jesus Christ must not draw back from any place, which Heaven has appointed for the scene of his sufferings. Our blessed Lord did not only go to the place, but voluntarily presented himself there. He did not attempt to make his escape, nor withdraw himself from his heavenly Father's determination: But, as he formerly had permitted himself to be led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil; so here he suffers himself to be led to the Mount of Olives, in order to enter on the decisive encounter with this prince of dark-

ness. He now calls to us, as Gideon did to his men, 'Look on me, and do likewise!' (Judges vii. 17.) When the providence of God is pleased to lead us to any place appointed for our sufferings, we are not to hesitate, or refuse to present ourselves there; for it is said in Scripture, 'If any man draw back, or desert, my soul has no pleasure in him.' (Heb. x. 38.)

2. We are to enter on the place of our sufferings with a willing resignation, free from all backwardness or repugnancy. This is also set forth in the energy of the Greek word. It is not said, that he was dragged by force to the place; but it denotes a spontaneous voluntary motion. O blessed Saviour! Had all the world exerted their combined strength, they could not, by force, have drawn thee to this place; it was thine unspeakable love alone that brought thee to Gethsemane. With us, alas! it is quite otherwise; as it is said, 'Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not.' (John xxi. 18.) Flesh and blood naturally starts back at a place of suffering. But as by thy willingness thou hast atoned for our reluctance; may thy example, O blessed Jesus, impart to us strength and power joyfully to overcome any such unwillingness to suffer for thy sake.

II. In our Saviour's words to his disciples it is very observable, that his first care is about them, before he takes the least thought about his own particular concerns. The care of his poor flock lay nearest the good shepherd's heart; and 'having loved his own, he loved them to the end.' As the High Priest, in the Old Testament, bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on his breast-plate when he entered into the Holy of Holies, on the great day of atonement; so this faithful High Priest, the Chief of the spiritual Israel, bore his disciples, as it were, in his heart, when he was going to present his supplications in the sanctuary of God.

These words of Christ contain, *first*, an account of what he himself was going to do; and *secondly*, what he would have his disciples to do at this great crisis.

Of the former he says, 'whilst I go and pray yonder.' He intends to withdraw from them, and pray. As it was, at other times, his custom to pray alone, so likewise now he was going to pour out his supplications to his Father, in private. It was but fit, that the most important event which ever came to pass should begin with prayer. When King David, one of the most express types of Christ, in his flight from Absalom, was to pass over this same Mount of Olives; it is said, 'When David was come to the top of the mount, he worshipped God.' (2 Sam. xv. 32.) For, from that eminence he could have a sight of the ark of the covenant, over which the presence of the Lord of Hosts rested, returning to the city. On the same Mount of Olives the Lord and Son of David likewise offers his prayers; but instead of the summit of the hill, he chooses the deepest valley at the foot of it, as the case required the most extraordinary humiliation and debasement.

The Holy Ghost had before caused it to be written concerning the Messiah by the pen of David, that in his most bitter sufferings he would cast the anchor of his hope in God's sanctuary! The book of Psalms exhibits the agonies of Christ under a sense of the Divine wrath, where it is said 'In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God.' (Psalm xviii. 6.) 'O my God, I cry unto thee in the daytime, and in the night-season, (as it was then night) I am not silent.' (Psalm xxii. 2.) 'My prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time.' (Psalm lxxix. 13.) 'But I give myself unto prayer.' (Psalm cix. 4.) or, as it may be more properly rendered, 'I am prayer itself.' *i. e.* All that I do is to recommend my cause unto thee in prayer. For though he was

come from prayer and conversing with his heavenly father, (John xviii. 1. compared with xvii. 1.) he did not think it an irksome task to be always praying. He soon returned to it again; this being, as it were, the element in which his soul lived. But this prayer must be considered in a very different light from that of the best who is but mere man. This prayer was not begun merely from a habit of praying; but in this he presents himself before his Father, as the oblation for the sins of the world, and the immaculate lamb of God. This was a part of the sacerdotal function, and the import of his prayer was; 'Lo! here I am to do thy will, O God.' Hence we are to learn as follows:

1. Prayer is the principal and most important thing we can set about in the hour of temptation. Did Christ himself in the affliction of his soul know of nothing better adapted to the occasion, or more necessary, to which he could betake himself? certainly we cannot pretend to find out a better expedient. Prayer is reckoned by St. Paul as part of the spiritual panoply which is to be used in an evil hour. (Ephes. vi. 18.) Whoever will venture himself among the fiery darts of the wicked without this weapon, will hardly come off without a wound. But alas! it is a frequent error among the children of God to be so anxious about human means in their distress, as utterly to forget this best expedient, prayer. Deluded reason suggests, that the Almighty does not himself stretch out his arm from heaven to this sublunary world, but makes use of men as his instruments, for manifesting his power in succouring the distressed. Though this conclusion in itself be just, yet unbelief may stretch this proposition so far, as to exclude all prayer and reliance upon God; a fatal rock! which cannot be avoided with too much circumspection.

2. As public or united prayer has its particular promises and blessings; so personal and private

prayer is sometimes not less necessary and beneficial. Christ himself has afforded us an example, that one must not supplant the other. He had prayed with his disciples, and in their presence, (John xvii.) and now he is going to pour out his supplication alone. We ought therefore to do the one, and not to leave the other undone. It is proper that families should perform their public devotions every morning and evening together; but it is likewise highly necessary that, besides this united sacrifice of prayer, every one in particular should pour out his heart to God in private, (Matt. vi. 6.) and with the simplicity of a child, converse with his heavenly Father. Great, indeed, is the advantage of both; but the latter has certainly the least temptation to the practice of hypocrisy.

But, secondly, our Lord farther signifies in the words under consideration, what he would have his disciples to do at this important crisis.

I. 'Sit ye here,' says our blessed Lord. At the same time, we may suppose, he pointed to a place, perhaps at the entrance of the garden, where his disciples were to stay till he had done praying. The like circumstance occurs at the intended sacrifice of Isaac. (Gen. xxii. 5.) These words are peculiarly addressed to eight of his disciples, who possibly might be the weakest, and the least capable of beholding his dreadful agonies. He therefore shows a place at a little distance, where they were to continue in the mean time; but the other three disciples he takes along with him, that they may be nearer his person, and witnesses of his mental sufferings. Hence the following observations naturally arise.

1. It is not advisable for a servant of God, when under sufferings, to lay his heart open indiscriminately to all. Of this Christ himself gives us an example, who did not allow all his disciples to be present at his inward agonies, ordering the greater part of them to keep at a distance; well knowing, that they might be

offended by a nearer view of his unspeakable anguish and agonizing conflict. The children of God, when under severe sufferings, and especially when they are pressed by violent inward trials and temptations, are often a stumbling block, and cause many pious souls to fall and be offended ; so that under such circumstances, some precaution is absolutely necessary, not to disclose inadvertently the secret motions and anguish of the heart of every by-stander.

2. It is a certain sign that God well knows that we are not yet mature for sufferings, when he allows us to stand at a distance, and view the sufferings of others. For a Christian to be exempt from bearing the cross is not so much a sign of God's particular favour, as of our own imbecility and weakness. If, therefore, we would become worthy to bear the glorious 'marks of the Lord Jesus,' we must be diligent in the use of those means that will support and comfort us under temptations and sufferings.

II. In the next place, our Lord says, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Christ would not have them be idle or fall asleep in the mean time : but that they should join in prayer with him though absent. He directs them to pray, that their prayers might be to them a fence against the approaching temptation. Prayer is the most effectual preservative against temptation. It is the breast-work whither we must betake ourselves at the approach of temptations and trials. Hence we learn the following doctrines :

1. Under trouble and afflictions we are not to estrange ourselves, and, as it were, withdraw from God ; but, on the contrary, we should approach nearer to the throne of grace. They, who attend to the secret movements in their souls, must have observed, that in the critical time of trouble the tempter chiefly endeavours to divert us from prayer ; so that even good men are too apt to neglect it. But their conscience afterwards stings them with remorse, and the

tempter himself reproaches them for this neglect. The devil is a dangerous enemy, seducing the human mind even under a mystic appearance ; especially in those who, instead of resisting his impious suggestions, let him use his utmost efforts, and unconcernedly wait the issue. He is a subtle fiend under which the dull, sluggish flesh easily lurks. Therefore when pressing troubles, and the unwilling flesh, would deter us from the duty of prayer, we should enter upon it, as it were by force, and thus by prayer clear our way through all dissipations, difficulties, and temptations.

2. Christ's intercession, and that of other believers, does not exempt us from the duty of personal prayer. Christ prays for his disciples ; yet does he enjoin them to pray for themselves likewise. When others pray for us, they are to pour forth their supplications with such zeal and fervour, as if we did not pray at all ; and when we pray ourselves, our petitions should be offered up with so much earnestness as if no other person prayed for us, and the weight of the duty rested on ourselves alone. Simon Magus, indeed, had recourse to the intercessions of others, that he might not embarrass himself with prayer ; (Acts viii. 24.) but his example is by no means worthy of our imitation.

3. Prayer is not to be deferred till the temptation has actually overtaken us, but must be used as a preservative to ward it off. This is also one of Satan's devices, to reduce us to a careless security before temptation, and to render us cold and lifeless in the duty of prayer when we are under the pressure of it. If he can thus bind our feeble hands, he is sure to carry his point. Let us therefore by no means neglect to pray, till the temptation has actually beset us ; but at the first approach of it be vigilant and upon our guard, and arm ourselves with prayer against its attacks. In the hour of temptation we should set before our eyes the blessed Jesus praying most fer-

vently, and from his illustrious example we shall, at the same time, derive new resolution and inward strength.

THE PRAYER.

O MOST faithful Saviour ! unfeigned thanksgiving and endless praise be ascribed to thee, that by thy prayer, as High Priest, thou hast sanctified prayer, and hast imparted to it an efficacy whereby we shall be able to overcome the assaults of our spiritual enemy. Grant that thy holy Spirit may powerfully incite us to prayer when the evil hour approaches, that we may not be indolent in arming ourselves with this powerful weapon, when the enemy is preparing to make an effort on our souls. And do thou, blessed Jesus, come to our assistance with thy prevailing intercession, that our weak imperfect prayer may be sanctified, and rendered acceptable to thy Father, for the sake of thy love. Amen.



CONSIDERATION III.

THE BEGINNING OF CHRIST'S SORROWFUL ANGUISH.

‘ And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, and began to be sorrowful, and sore amazed, and very heavy. And Jesus said unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me.’ (Matt. xxvi. 37, 38. Mark xiv. 33, 34.)

These words represent to us the sorrow and anguish of our Lord Jesus ; in which we may observe,

First, The spectators who were present, and

Secondly, The intenseness and violence of his sorrow.

I. The spectators of the sorrow and anguish of our blessed Saviour were Peter, James, and John, three of the principal of his disciples. The first was Peter, who before had shewed such intrepidity, and had, as it were, obtruded himself on our blessed Saviour, and set himself above all the rest of his disciples, saying, 'Lord I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death; though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will not I;' accordingly now the trial approaches; he must be present at this extraordinary transaction. Here, amidst these perturbations and agonies of our blessed Lord, he had an opportunity of approving his courage and resolution. Hence St. Peter, in a particular manner, stiles himself 'a witness of the sufferings of Christ.' (1 Peter v. 1.) After him follow James and John, who are not here called the sons of Zebedee without design; for by this appellation we are referred to Matt. xx. 22. where Christ puts this question to them, 'Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of?' they readily answered 'we are able.' Here, therefore, they had an opportunity of giving a proof of their boasted fortitude; in which however they were far from acquitting themselves with honour.

Now these three disciples the blessed Jesus took with him. The rest were to remain at a distance, perhaps at the entrance of the garden; but these were permitted to attend him, not only that they might be witnesses of his agony, (the law of Moses requiring two or three witnesses to the confirmation of a fact) but possibly, that under his unspeakable anguish of soul he might receive some little comfort by conversing with them. The other disciples were also in sight; but not so near his sacred person. The knowledge of the transaction was not concealed from them; there was only some difference in the degrees of this knowledge. Our blessed Lord knew them to be as yet too weak to support a nearer view of his dreadful

conflict with death; whereas he probably endured these three with a greater portion of strength and grace. We are certain from the evangelic history, that in particular circumstances he had these three disciples near his person; as when he raised Jairus's daughter to life, (Luke viii. 51.) and at his transfiguration on the holy mountain. (Matt. xvii. 1.) As they had then seen the majesty of Christ displayed in its greatest glory whilst in the days of his flesh, so they were to be witnesses of his lowest abasement and humiliation. Hence may be deduced the following doctrines:

1. The divine wisdom usually distinguishes not only the strong from the weak, but likewise the feeble from the weakest Christian, and proportions the temptation to their respective degrees of strength. This wise and gracious distinction our blessed Saviour observes in the instance before us. The disciples, who followed him, were a poor, weak, illiterate set of men; and yet among these some were weaker than others. The weakest of all the stations at a greater distance from him; and those who were something stronger, he takes along with him, and, in some measure, admits them to a fellowship of his sufferings. It is said, 'He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.' (1 Cor. x. 13.) This economy he alone understands, who searches the heart, and tries the strength of every individual; and therefore we are to acquiesce in his dealings, without any expostulation, or saying with Peter 'Lord but what shall this man suffer?' (John xxi. 21.) Otherwise we shall have the like answer, 'What is that to thee? follow thou me.'

2. In severe trials and temptations it is by no means advisable to rely too much on our own strength, or to be fond of solitude. Christ did not stand in any need of his disciples on his own account. However, by taking some of them to be near him, as a kind of relief under the pressure of his sufferings, he intend-

ed, by his own divine example, to introduce and sanctify this means of relief by society in distress. Therefore they judge amiss who, under severe temptations, are too fond of solitude ; will rely on their own strength only ; and slight the discourse, consolation, and prayers of other pious men. By such a proceeding they may precipitate themselves into still greater dangers ; and to such may be applied the passage in Ecclesiastes, (chap. iv. 9, 10, 12.) ‘ Two are better than one ; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow : but woe to him that is alone when he falleth ; for he hath not another to help him up. One may prevail against him, but two shall withstand, &c.’ Our spiritual enemy had rather encounter one single person alone, and can more easily overcome him ; whereas a number of good men, though weak, may, by their united prayers, and faith, more easily resist his attempts.

3. The greatest and severest spiritual trials happen either to those whom God has already highly favoured, or to such as he intends to employ on some important occasion. These three Apostles had been with Christ on the holy mount before they attended him to the Mount of Olives. They are called Pillars ; (Gal. ii. 9.) and were afterwards employed in extraordinary transactions. Peter was the first who opened the doors of the kingdom of heaven to the Jews and Gentiles. (Acts ii. and x.) James was the first of all the Apostles who sealed the truth of the doctrine of Christ with his blood.* (Acts xii.) On the other hand, St. John was to survive all the disciples, and be favoured with sublime revelations of the state of the church of God to the end of the world. These disciples, therefore, were admitted to a nearer

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 * He is supposed to have suffered martyrdom in the fourth year of Claudius, and the forty-fourth of the vulgar Era. Vide *Pearson Annal. Paulini. W.*

view, a more intimate knowledge of their master's mental agonies than the rest of their brethren. This is a method which the divine wisdom has always observed in its proceedings. Abraham was appointed by God to be the father of the faithful; but at the same time, that patriarch passed through such trials, as, in the judgment of Luther, not one of his descendants would have been able to bear. Paul was most eminently distinguished and blessed in his apostolic office; but he also laboured and suffered more than all the other Apostles. In like manner Luther was prepared for the important work of the Reformation by great and arduous trials. Could we, without labour or conflict, attain to such a high pitch of holiness, and be made such illustrious instruments in the hands of God, most of us would willingly be admitted to such a degree of Divine favour; but such a signal favour of God is dealt only to such as he has tried and approved.

II. The vehemence of the internal sorrow and anguish of our blessed Lord, as described by the Evangelists, was such, that he both felt it inwardly, and likewise discovered it by his words.

1. That he felt it inwardly appears from these words, 'And he began to be sorrowful, sore amazed, and very heavy.' These expressions first teach us, that the blessed Jesus voluntarily endured his agony. 'He began to be sorrowful,' which words denote a spontaneous action. This is not a mere Greek phrase, according to which, the words, 'he began to be sorrowful,' may likewise import he grew sorrowful. In this most remarkable history, the Holy Spirit has not inspired a single expression without design. By this expression is rather signified that Christ, in taking on himself this sorrow, not rashly but deliberately and willingly, gave himself up to the Divine justice; for in the whole transaction he acknowledged his Father acting as judge. The expres-

sion, 'he began' occurs long before, (Matt. xvi. 21.) 'From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples, how he must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things,' &c. Now as the words 'he began to be sorrowful' include both an active and passive sense, so through every part of our Saviour's passion, both active and passive obedience are always connected.

The sorrow of the blessed Jesus is further represented as very bitter and vehement. The Evangelists use different phrases to express the anguish of his soul: 'He began to be overwhelmed with sorrow; to be sore amazed; to be troubled and seized with fear and dread;' as it is said of St. Paul when frightened by a sudden flash of lightning, he spoke trembling and astonished, (Acts ix. 6.) and likewise of the women when surprised by the appearance of an angel at the sepulchre. (Mark xvi. 5.) 'He began to be sore amazed,' which word in the original denotes the most painful anguish of soul and depression of spirit, Thus we see how attentive the Evangelists were in searching out the most expressive words to describe, in some faint manner, this vehement agony of his mind. For as man, in whose stead this sacred person offered himself, consists of soul and body, the representative was likewise to suffer in soul and body. These words are illustrated at large in the passion-Psalms, where the anguish of Christ is very pathetically represented. (Psalms xviii. 5, 6, 8. xl. 13. lxix. 2, 3, 15, 16. lxxxviii. 4, 5, 8, 16, 17, 18.) Moreover it is also mentioned by the Evangelists, that,

2. He discovered this anguish by his words, 'And Jesus said unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me.' By this our blessed Lord intimates two things.

First, he signifies what had already befallen him. This is a very remarkable circumstance, that Christ

informs his disciples of his agonizing condition. Had he here been as a mute lamb, we should never had any knowledge of this mystery. It is he himself who makes known his sorrow; which was not only to come to pass, but likewise to be declared to us. The first belongs to the merit of Christ, the second gives us grounds for appropriating his merit to ourselves, without which there is no salvation for us. Thus Christ here shews himself both priest and prophet; and at the same time that he acquires the merit, he also provides for the appropriation of that merit to mankind, to which the way is prepared by declaring it to his disciples. Admirable display of infinite love and consummate wisdom!

But what does he say to his disciples? 'My soul is sorrowful, even unto death.' The chief seat of his agony was his soul, which was subject to the like passions with ours. His soul was now, as it were, hemmed in with sorrow, like a city closely besieged and pressed on all sides by the enemy; as the Messiah is introduced pouring forth his complaints in these words: (Ps. xl. 12.) 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about.' And this sorrow was 'unto death, that is, it was so great that it might have broken his heart, and thus have brought on his death; or because it would not cease till death put an end to it. Thus here he already felt the whole weight of it. Whatever is meant by death here rushed at once on the blessed Jesus; for the soul may suffer more in an instant, than the body in a long succession of many years.

Secondly, He makes known what he requires of the disciples, 'tarry here, and watch with me.' He does not require them to be sorrowful, amazed, and heavy; but only to stay and watch with him, that they might be witnesses of his agony, and prepare and arm themselves against the trial which was also coming on them. By this he manifested their frailty; and by

this mournful spectacle, the pride of relying on their natural strength was mortified. Hence let us learn :

That Christ in the internal sufferings of his soul is to be considered as bearing the sins of the whole world, and the wrath of God in our stead. This is the principal doctrine inculcated by this terrible circumstance, without which all the mystical and moral speculations which the most subtile genius can produce will be of no avail. Our eyes must therefore be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that we may view Christ in his sorrows as 'the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' (John i. 29.) Other martyrs have gone cheerfully to tortures and death ; whence then arises such sorrow and trembling here ? Is the chief of all martyrs more timorous and faint-hearted than they ? Is he afraid of the scourgs of contumely, or of death ? God forbid ! His fear arises from quite another cause. He was to suffer a death which was not yet divested of its sting ; whereas their death had before-hand lost its sting in Christ. God placed him before his judgment seat, and caused him to feel that dreadful wrath which burns to the lowest parts of hell. If a malefactor, sentenced to a temporal death, is often almost distracted with fear ; let it be considered what terror and consternation must have filled the soul of the blessed Jesus, when eternal death was not only adjudged to him instead of all mankind, but also inflicted on him in the severest and most sensible manner. He had now nothing before him but God's awful tribunal, and horrible imagery of the sins of the whole world. How does a single sin oppressing the conscience so torment a man, that no place can afford him refuge or peace ? And were only the accumulated sins committed within a great city in the space of one year, to be placed before the eyes of a pious soul, with what pungent sorrow would it not be affected ? But here our blessed Lord, by the light

of his omniscience, had present to his mind the sins of the whole race of mankind. What grief and anguish therefore must this dismal spectacle have occasioned in his soul. Now this circumstance is to be improved,

1. For promoting a salutary contrition and sorrow. Behold, wretched man! thou committest innumerable sins with pleasure, and the Son of God must expiate them with such inexpressible pain. Art thou not concerned to cause such heaviness and sorrow to thy Lord and Saviour? When a criminal is to undergo an uncommon punishment, we conclude that he must have committed some atrocious crime; but our blessed Lord has not suffered for his own, but our trespasses. Therefore let the greatness of his sorrow inform thee how horrible sin must be, which could provoke the righteous God to inflict such rigorous punishment on his only son. What thou seest him endure here, thou thyself oughtest to have suffered. With this anguish and sorrow thou shouldest have been oppressed to all eternity. And, indeed, all this agony, in an eternity of darkness and torment, await those sinners who will not, by faith and repentance, make themselves partakers of the fruits of Christ's sufferings. Therefore, O sinner, forbear to heap up treasures of wrath, which an infinite and omnipotent God will pour upon thee, if by this agony of his son thou art not moved to sorrow and repentance.

2. For promoting a true and lively faith. Behold, thou that hast a sincere hatred against sin, here thy sins lie on the head of that sacred victim, the Lamb of God. They are included in the heavy load which oppresses him. They have no more right in thee; fear not, thou shalt never be made to atone for them. God is not unrighteous to demand of thee a debt, which his Son has generously discharged by his anguish and sorrow. In this mirror acknowledge thy

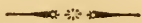
wickedness; acknowledge that thou didst occasion this sorrow to thy Saviour, but acknowledge likewise that he acquired for thee a precious oil of gladness. By his extreme sorrow he has gained thee a proportionate, and consequently the most exquisite, felicity. As thou never wouldst have cause for one instant of joy either in time or eternity, if Christ had not endured this for thee; so now, not even under the cross hast thou occasion to be sorrowful for a moment, if thou doest but truly stand in faith and the grace of God.

3. For promoting a cordial and unfeigned love to the Lord Jesus. Who will not love him, who, from the free impulse of his exalted love, underwent such sorrow and anguish for our sake? The more painful his love towards us has been, to him the more ardent and willing should our love be, to endure all kind of pain for his sake.

4. For a powerful source of comfort under trials and afflictions. O thou tempted and afflicted soul, place a strong confidence in thy merciful High Priest, who, from experience, knows thy distress and trouble; and having himself felt thy infirmities, he will not only have patience with thee, but also knows how to help and support thee. In thy sorrow and dread of God's judgments there is intermixed a sinful repining; but he bore his inexpressible anguish without murmuring or impatience; and by this his blameless and undeserved sorrow, he has covered the spots and blemishes of thy sorrow, that they shall not be laid to thy charge at the divine tribunal.—Therefore when thou art under anguish of mind, shelter thyself in the soul-felt agony of thy Mediator; and be confident that as certainly as he did not sink under them, but was delivered from sorrow and judgment, so certainly shalt thou again lift up thy head, and by his sorrow shalt be entitled to everlasting joy and tranquility.

THE PRAYER.

ALL praise and thanksgiving be rendered to the O blessed Jesus, for the anguish, sorrow, and heaviness with which thy soul, hypostatically united with the Godhead, did submit to be oppressed! Thou art the power of the Most High, and hast once been overwhelmed with fear, and that only for our good. When the light of thy countenance is withdrawn, all the creatures are terrified. Thy mighty power has placed us in this world; but thy weakness lifts us up to heaven. Let us therefore enjoy the fruits of thy anguish and sorrow, during our whole lives, and particularly at the tremendous hour of death; that then we may walk without fear or dread through the gloomy vale of death, which thou hast sanctified with thy blessed footsteps. Grant this for the sake of thy love to mankind. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IV.

OUR SAVIOUR'S PREPARATION FOR PRAYER;
WHEN OPPRESSED WITH ANGUISH AND
SORROW; MATTHEW XXVI. 39. MARK
XIV. 35, 36. LUKE XXII. 41.

‘AND he went a little farther, and was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and fell on his face to the ground, and prayed, That if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.’

These words exhibit to us our Saviour’s preparation for prayer in his agony. In which we may observe,

First, his attitude in it;

Secondly, the purport of his prayer.

I. As to the attitude of our Saviour during his prayer and conflict; it is observable, 1. That he withdrew from his disciples; for it is said ‘he went a

little farther.' At first he was in company with his eleven disciples; afterwards he chose three of them, whom he took along with him, leaving the rest behind him. To these three he made known the inexpressible sorrow and anguish of his soul; and now he also left these at a distance, and went farther on in the garden, though but a little way; so that they had still a plain view of him, and by the light of the moon, they could discern how he was employed.—But it is soon after said, that 'he withdrew from them a stone's cast.' This denotes a still farther removal, in which his design was to prevent his disciples taking any offence at his extreme sorrow and dread, and that he might the more freely pour out his heart before his heavenly Father. But the Greek word, by which this removal is expressed, signifies that 'he was carried or snatched away from them,' which exhibits a lively representation of the manner of it, viz. that he was seized by vehement anguish, overpowered, and, as it were, impelled forward, as a stone is cast by force some paces before one. This privacy suited our blessed Lord's present situation, as he now was pleading with his heavenly Father. The supreme judge, and the greatest sinner, who consented that all the transgressions of the whole world should be laid on him, were now to confer with each other. Now his most faithful friends were to stay behind; for in this important crisis no created being could afford him any assistance.

2. 'He kneeled.' St. Luke says 'that he kneeled down,' bent his knees down to the ground, as an altar on which he offered up himself to his father. When the awful majesty of God displays itself in righteousness, every knee must bow. We find it recorded of other holy persons in Scripture that they prayed kneeling, as Solomon, (2. Chron. vi. 13.) Ezra, (Ezra ix. 5.) Paul, &c. (Acts xx. 36.) But what is their kneeling in comparison with this. Solomon was a

king, Ezra a priest, Paul a prophet or teacher. But he who kneeled here was at once king, priest, and prophet. They were dust and ashes, and their honour did not suffer by their kneeling down in the dust ; but here the Lord of heaven and earth kneeled, to whom 'every knee shall bow.'

3. 'He fell on his face to the ground.' O! what a spectacle is here ! The only son of the eternal Father lies prostrate in the dust. The bread which came down from heaven, and giveth life to the world, now lies on the earth. This is an humble posture, which suits his creatures only. When David (2 Sam. xii. 16.) besought God for the life of his child, he lay all night on the ground ; but here the Son and Lord of David, lying with his face on the ground, exhibits a quite different spectacle. The great Judge cannot but relent, when the accused humbles himself so low. Hence it is said, 'in his humiliation, his judgment was taken away.' (Acts viii. 33.) From this external deportment of our Saviour in his prayer we may learn,

1. That the reconciliation of mankind by Christ was to be attended with circumstances quite opposite to those, by which our fall was occasioned. The fall was occasioned by the most audacious presumption ; man refusing to be any longer subject to his Creator, or be dependent on him in a blameless course of obedience : but would at once, as it were, scale heaven ; and, had it been possible, would have dethroned God, before whom the holy angels fall prostrate on their faces, and have seated himself in his throne. In the commission of that crime all was arrogance and presumption : In the expiation of it nothing is seen but humiliation and abasement.—When any aspiring presumptuous thoughts rise in us, let us think on the debased Jesus, with his whole body extended on the earth, and humbling himself, like an abject worm, before the Divine Justice.

2. The inward awe and reverence, with which we should be filled in prayer, must also shew itself outwardly in a reverential posture. Here the Son of God, whilst he is pleading our cause with his Father, kneels on the ground; why then are our knees so stiff and inflexible, that they do not bend before the supreme Majesty of heaven, when we are addressing ourselves to God about our own concerns? This, indeed, is not the essential part of prayer; yet, where the heart is possessed with real humility, and reverence for the Supreme Being, it will certainly shew itself outwardly. Such a one will not appear before God with that boldness, nor use such a careless and unseemly behaviour as is too common among many; especially persons of learning and rank, who seem to be ashamed of prayer. Let us not vainly imagine, that the innocent Lamb of God, by these his humble gestures, has expiated for the proud or indolent postures which men, to the dishonour of God, frequently use in prayer.

3. In following Christ we may fall into such circumstances that we must, as it were, disengage ourselves from all men, as finding no help or comfort in any creature. This was here the case of Christ himself, the head and captain of the church militant. Here was fulfilled what he had before said, 'Behold the hour cometh when ye shall all be scattered, and shall leave me alone.' (John xvi. 32.) On the mount of glorification (Luke ix. 36.) Jesus only was seen at last; Moses and Elias, after talking with him of the event which he was to fulfil at Jerusalem, having disappeared. This was a type, signifying, that in his sufferings he should be destitute of all human comfort. Thus it may sometimes happen, that in following Christ we must gradually withdraw from our best friends, as Christ first withdraws from the eleven, and afterwards from the three disciples, and goes away to pray alone. But it appears from these

words, 'I am not alone; for the Father is with me,' (John xvi. 32.) with whom, in such solitary hours we ought to converse with the greater intimacy.

II. As to the purport of the prayer, it is said, 'He prayed, that if it were possible, this hour might pass from him.'

This expression, 'He prayed,' is often repeated in this history; as if the Evangelists had all agreed to induce us, by the frequent repetition, to take notice of this prayer of the Lord Jesus. The more his sorrows pressed upon him, the more he persevered in prayer to his Father, and humbled himself before the most just tribunal of God against all the accusations of the enemy. Herein was, as it were, the quintessence of prayer. Without this prayer of the Mediator, God would never have accepted of any prayer from sinners. When our Saviour at the beginning of his ministry was tempted by the devil, the last and most impudent assault was made in these words: 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down, and worship me.' But Christ, having baffled the audacious enemy with these words, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,' the tempter departed from him: but, as St. Luke very remarkably adds, 'It was but for a season.' (Luke iv. 13.) He now returns again in the gloomy hour of trial, and, without doubt, with his usual effrontery renews the temptation. But Christ, in this instance also, continues true to his Father, and worships God only; and now an angel comes to strengthen him, as, after the former temptation, 'The angels came to minister unto him.'

But let us now enquire, What was properly the purport of our Saviour's prayer? 'That, if it were possible, this hour might pass from him.' He calls the suffering allotted to him, and of which he had already a foretaste, an Hour. (John xii. 27. xiii. 1.) It had before been said, (John vii. 30.) 'His hour

was not yet come.' But now it was come, as our blessd Lord himself says in his prayer, 'Father, the hour is come.' This was indeed an important hour, set apart in the eternal decrees of God for the sufferings of his Son; an hour, or time, which the spirit in the prophets had long before signified; (1 Peter i. 11.) an hour which our blessd Lord had before his eyes, and expected it as a woman expects the hour of her travail. This word includes likewise the whole torrent of sufferings with which his feeble humanity was to be overwhelmed, as the anguish and sorrow, the insults, pains, and death he endured: but it more particularly denotes the present hour of his inward agony, his anguish of soul; when the floods of God's wrath were discharged on him; when he stood before the Divine tribunal as the greatest criminal, loaded with the oppressive weight of the sins of the whole world.

Concerning this hour, he prays, That it might pass from him. The desire of being freed from pain, or at least some mitigation of it, is indeed in itself a natural and blameless affection; a state of suffering being an adventitious thing for which human nature was not originally created; yet it may easily become sinful in us, by means of original sin, which dwelleth in us. But in Christ it was pure and unadulterated, he himself not being liable to suffer but from a voluntary covenant; nor had he the least taint of sin in himself. But our miseries moved him to it; and he felt the accumulated burden in such an oppressive manner, that he would fain try whether he could, in a legal way, obtain some alleviation of it. He therefore does not properly petition his Father, That all the sufferings he was to undergo may pass from him, as it is commonly expounded; but he means only to obtain, in the present hour of extreme inward trouble and anguish, an abatement and shortening of the dreadful agony he felt, which might have given of-

fence even to his disciples, who were unacquainted with the mystery of his sufferings.

He further adds, 'If it be possible;' i. e. If it can be done consistently with the holiness and justice of God, and without breaking into the pre-established decree of his Father. Such was the purport of our Saviour's prayer, which will be enlarged on in the following Consideration. In the mean time we may learn from it,

1. That oral prayer is by no means to be neglected or undervalued by Christians. Those persons, whose reason would prescribe to Christianity, say, We ought mentally to pray always; and it savours of superstition, to think that we stand in need of words to give our prayers utterance, or that we are bound to set apart a certain time for that purpose. But certainly all these idle evasions are invalidated by the example of Christ himself. Prayer requires a separation from the busy world, and serious recollection of our scattered thoughts; the faculties being dissipated by too much labour and hurry of business. It is indeed proper and necessary at all times to lift up our hearts to God, and to walk in his sight; but this does not supercede the use of oral prayer, and whoever neglects it will gradually find himself estranged from God and religion.

2. Christianity does not consist in a stoical insensibility, but in an humble submission and resignation to the will of God, under a sense of the burden of afflictions. The world is apt to imagine, that Christians are void of any feeling or sensibility; but here we see, in the very highest example, that 'no chastisement for the present can be accounted joyous.' The world, when convinced of this, calumniates on the other side, and says, I thought Christians were such heroes as to despise sufferings; but I see that when they are touched they murmur and repine

like other people. Alas! the present burden indeed presses hard upon us; however we are to possess our souls in patience under its oppressive weight.

THE PRAYER.

THANKS be to thee, O dearest Saviour, that thou hast truly felt our burden, and was tempted in all things as we are, though without sin. All praise be to thee for thy deep humiliation in prayer, by which thou hast atoned for our pride, and left us a perfect example to follow. Propitiously look upon us in the hour of trial; and may we arm ourselves with prayer, and for the sake of thy conquest be conquerors in all things. Amen.



CONSIDERATION V.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS IN HIS SORROW AND ANGUISH OF SOUL.

‘AND he said, Abba, father! all things are possible unto thee. If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.’ (Matt. xxvi. 39. Mark xiv. 36. Luke xxii. 42.)

These are the words of our Saviour's prayer in his sorrow and conflict; in which are to be attentively considered, first, the proem, secondly, the petition itself.

I. The proem is mentioned by the evangelists in the Chaldean and Greek languages. As to the Chaldean appellation, it is to be observed,

1. That the word Abba in the Chaldean translation of the Old Testament is never used to denote a civil title of honour and respect, but a real and natural father.

2. That it is particularly used by children when they would sooth their parents, as the very sound of

the word seems to imply something tender and endearing: And this expression of love and confidence receives further strength by the addition of the Greek word father. The word Abba had long before been typically uttered by Isaac, a lively type of Christ, when he was going to be sacrificed by his Father. (Gen. xxii. 7.) But here it is repeated a second time by the great Antitype, who, by twice calling on the name of his Father, manifests his filial affection towards him. For though he was like a victim to feel the wrath of God; yet he penetrates through the obscure, thick cloud, and calls him his Father, and that in a sense too sublime for any of the sons of men to repeat it after him; he having in his divine nature derived his origin from the essence of the Father by eternal generation, and according to his human nature, obtained the dignity of a Son of God by adoption, in the person of the WORD. 'And as we are sons by adoption, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son in our hearts, crying Abba, father.' (Rom. viii. 15.)

II. After the proem, follows the petition itself, which consists, first, of a proposition, and secondly, a conclusion. The proposition is this, 'All things are possible to thee. If it be possible, remove this cup from me.' Thus the Lord Jesus previously lays down a fundamental truth, namely, that all things are possible to God; which is also asserted in other passages of Scripture. However, there are things which may, in some measure, be said even to be impossible to Almighty God, viz. such as are inconsistent with his nature and essential attributes, or contrary to his eternal decrees. According to the former, it is impossible that God should lye, or break his promise; (Heb. vi. 18.) this being incompatible with his veracity. This inability therefore is by no means to be looked on as an imperfection; for if he was to do

this, he would no longer be the most perfect Being. As to the latter, it would be contrary to his eternal decree to confer eternal happiness on an obstinate sinner, who contemns the means of grace ; and consequently this is also impossible with God.

The humanity of Christ, in its present state of the deepest humiliation, when the sensible influence of the divine effulgency was for a time withheld, and consequently when it could not so clearly perceive the divine decrees, not knowing whether the Father had absolutely determined how long the inward feeling of his wrath should last in him ; our blessed Lord adds, ' If it be possible,' if this prayer can be granted without crossing thy eternal decree, or as St. Luke expresses it, ' If thou be willing,' if thy holy will and previous decree admit of it.

After this dutiful resignation to the will of his Father, he proceeds in these words, ' Let this cup pass from me,' according to St. Matthew ; or as it stands in Mark, or Luke, ' Take or remove this cup from me ; which words receive some light, from what has already been observed in the preceding Consideration. These are certainly the most remarkable and difficult passages in this narrative, which exhibit a miracle to our eyes, and what, at the same time, must fill our hearts with fear and dread. In the illustration of these words, two cautions are particularly to be observed. The one is, that we do not lessen the sufferings of Christ, or diminish any thing from the intenseness and reality of them ; and the other, that no sinful imperfection or unwillingness be attributed to the person suffering. For if the most minute criminal wishes, or sinful dispositions had any place in Christ, he would himself have been subject to the law and its curse ; and consequently would not have freed us from them both. He must have been absolutely without the least taint of wickedness, as Adam was in the state of innocence.

Having previously taken notice of this particular, we shall now briefly consider the words themselves, 'Take this cup from me.' The main point here is the right meaning of the phrase 'this cup.' It must, indeed, be owned, that Christ in general calls his whole passion a cup, (Matt. xx. 22.) according to the usual phraseology of the scriptures; (Isaiah li. 17. Jer. xxv. 15. Psalm lxxv. 9.) and therefore most commentators are of opinion, that Christ by this expression is deprecating his whole approaching passion, viz. the external part of it, the pains, the cross, and death itself; yet in such a manner, that he immediately recollects himself, and acquiesces in the divine will. But, first, this is making Christ much inferior to the primitive martyrs; not one of whom is supposed to have asked of God to remove his sufferings. Secondly, Christ had already foretold to his disciples the principal parts of his outward sufferings, (Luke xviii. 22, 23.) and consequently had fully resolved to undergo them. Thirdly, the thing which he prays for must have been of such a nature that he might conceive it possible to be granted; but the removal of all his external sufferings was absolutely impossible, since by that means the whole work of reconciliation must have been frustrated. Fourthly, It must have been a petition in which he was heard, (Heb. v. 7.) which cannot be said if he prayed for the removal of all his sufferings in general. These circumstances evidently confute the common exposition of this text.

By the cup therefore is rather to be understood the present excruciating sense of the wrath of God, and the withdrawing of the sensible and comfortable assistance which, at other times, his human nature used to enjoy from the Divine. Hence all the evangelists subjoin *THIS* cup. All the other cups of his passion he was most willing and ready to drink; (John xviii. 11.) but this cup which he now first began to taste,

in which were poured the dregs of the wrath and curse of God, was so extremely bitter, that his spotless and feeble humanity shuddered at it.

Hence he cries out 'Let this cup pass from me,' in which words he only prays for the shortening of the duration of his painful inward agony; that it might soon pass over; that the dreadful tempest of the divine wrath which raged on his soul, whilst his Father was hid in a pavilion of dark water and thick clouds, and sent forth his thunder with hail-stones and coals of fire, (Psalm xviii. 12, 13.) might soon blow over and be hushed. The original word implies a speedy passing over. The great concern of a troubled and afflicted mind is how to clear its way; but in what kind or manner, our blessed Lord does not prescribe to his Father. Hence we learn the following particulars.

1. That Christ in all kinds of conflicts and trials was tempted, though without sin, that he might have compassion on those who are tempted. (Heb. ii. 17, 18.) This affords a sure ground of consolation to a soul under temptation. When the mind is depressed, the eyes must be immovably fixed on the immaculate Lamb of God, who also felt these afflictions; but preserved under them a filial confidence in his heavenly Father. Our blessed Saviour indeed, permitted the strong motions of the human will to assault him; but stood immoveable as a rock against all its efforts. Now he knows how to bear with his poor distressed members, and powerfully to succour them in those temptations, with which he himself was exercised.

2. It is to Christ and his meritorious sufferings that we owe the privilege of being allowed to pray to God for a shortening and abatement of our sufferings. Never can God lay so much on us as we deserve. And as the impatience and disobedient motions of the will intermix with our sufferings, we should have had no right in ourselves to pray to God for

shortening the duration, or abating the pressure of them. In order, therefore, to obtain such a privilege for us, an innocent and holy person, who of himself deserved no punishment, was to present himself and feel, without sin, motions inclining to a removal of his sufferings.

Secondly, the conclusion of the prayer is, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.' The Father's will, and the will of Jesus Christ are, indeed, different, but by no means opposite; as in Christ himself, the will of both natures are different, yet so that the human will is in a holy subjection to the divine. This human will felt in reality the anguish, and all the load of the divine displeasure. And therefore our blessed Saviour seems to say, The will of thy human nature has, indeed, some sinless aversion to suffering, (as our first parent before the fall would have had, a state of suffering being an adventitious circumstance for which man was not designed) particularly at present, when the sense of thy wrath presseth me sore; so that, if it be consistent with thy will, I could wish to be soon delivered from this agonizing state. But if it be thy judicial and paternal will, that I must bear this oppressive load of mental sufferings still longer, and drink of this bitter cup to the last drop, I heartily submit my human will to thy sentence, and desire nothing, but 'that thy will may be done.'

This, therefore, determines the issue of the whole matter. Here the third petition of the Lord's prayer is truly performed, and consecrated by the sacred lips of our Mediator and high Priest. It was his desire that his Father would not judge of him from his present state of pain and anguish, but according to the thoughts of his heart, in which the law of his Father was written. (Psalm xl. 3.) Under all these violent motions, the will of Christ continues pure and innocent, and at length is seen to rise superior to all

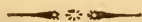
fear and reluctance. It is a filial, not a forced submission, accompanied with a confident reliance and resignation, so that his love to the Father remains undiminished. Hence let us learn,

That the submission of the human will in Christ to the divine is an important article, both of his propitiatory sacrifice, and of the great example which he has left for our imitation. Christ, in this sacrifice of his holy will, is chiefly to be considered as a reconciler atoning for our opposition to God and his sacred will. Alas, how frequent is it, on any contrariety betwixt God's will and ours, that the former is set aside, and our own will sinfully preferred to it. Even the children of God, especially when under temptations and trials, still feel in themselves the relics of this deep-rooted evil; so that in their wills they cast about for some secret refuge from the judgment of God. Herein is truly seen the force of original sin, displaying itself in an enmity against God and his ways. But this, at the same time, convinces us of the necessity of a reconciler, that this inward resistance against the judicial will of God, which were alone sufficient to condemn us, might be forgiven; and this enmity against God is never mortified but by a faithful appropriation of Christ's ransom. When we participate of that blessing, the mind is illuminated, and taught to look on God with other eyes; when we learn according to our Saviour's perfect example, to address his Majesty from our hearts, saying, 'Not mine, but thy will be done.'

THE PRAYER.

To thee dearest Saviour, thou tempted and merciful high Priest, all praise and thanksgiving be ascribed, that thou hast been pleased by the holy sacrifice of thy blessed will, to make satisfaction for, and expiate our enmity against the will of God; be

pleased, O blessed Jesus, by virtue of this thy propitiatory offering, and the influence of thy holy Spirit, to bring our corrupt and unruly wills to that harmony and order, in which they were at first created; so that it may be our food and our joy to fulfil the will of thy Father, and resign ourselves entirely to him. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VI.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION OF THE DISCIPLES.

‘AND he cometh to his disciples, and findeth them asleep; and he saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: The spirit, indeed, is willing; but the flesh is weak.’ (Matt. xxvi. 40, 41. Mark xiv. 37, 38.)

In these words is described Christ’s first coming or visit to the disciples; in which we may observe, first, the condition of the visited, secondly, the speech of our Lord to his disciples.

I. The condition of the visited is exceedingly wretched, and deserves pity. It is said, ‘He came to his disciples and found them sleeping’. The person visiting them was the suffering and agonizing Jesus, who now felt within himself the effect of God’s wrath, and was to plead our cause before the awful tribunal of the supreme Judge; but in all his agonies, he took care of his poor unthinking flock, that they might not fall into the hands of the tempter. Having accordingly, as it were, poured out his heart into his bosom, and offered up his own will to his, he returns to his three disciples, Peter, James, and John, from whom he had before removed about the distance of a stone’s cast, in order to see what plight they were in.

But the condition in which he found his disciples was very improper at such a crisis ; he found them sleeping. It was with them as with the ten foolish virgins (Matt. xxv. 5.), who, when the bride-groom delayed his coming, all slumbered and slept. It was indeed late at night, so that their eyes were heavy and closed; but this was likewise owing in some measure to the tempter, Christ having before told them, that satan had desired to sift them like wheat. How the blessed Jesus must have been affected on this occasion when his intimate friends were so very indifferent about his sufferings, may be easily conjectured. Here the following considerations offer themselves.

1. It ought to be esteemed a singular benefit, when God by the visitations of grace rouses a lethargic soul from its spiritual security. The disciples were not over-pleased that their Master should disturb them in their comfortable sleep, for to the weary sleep is sweet (Eecl. v. 12.) though it was the greatest kindness their Lord could do them. In what a dreadful consternation would they have been, had a party of armed soldiers surprised them fast asleep. We should likewise acknowledge it to be a sign of the tender love of Christ for our souls, when he does not allow us any liberty to indulge in sloth ; when he sedulously visits us by the secret reproofs of his Spirit ; when he disturbs our sleeping consciences, drives away all sleep from our eyes, and rouses us up when we are for lying down in a false security. Woe to that man whom the Spirit of the Lord does no longer chasten ; who is lost in insensibility ; whose heart does not smite him, when he commits any thing displeasing to God. This is a melancholy harbinger of approaching obduracy. O blessed Jesus, thou great Shepherd of Israel, do thou continually keep a watchful eye on our souls !

2. We have in Satan a subtle enemy, who knows how to make use of all opportunities to gain his point. The disciples were now tired and dispirited, and it was very late at night. How craftily does the tempter make use of these circumstances to lay them asleep? He is an artful enemy, and knows always how to lay in wait to surprize us. If he observes the mind to be overcast with the gross vapours of drunkenness and gluttony, he watches the unguarded moment, and points out to it an opportunity of proceeding further in the lusts of the flesh. Does he see a man inflamed with anger and passion? to such a one he suggests an opportunity of cooling his hot and raging blood, and satisfying his revenge by the perpetration of murder, &c. How then does it behove us to be every instant on our guard, that we may not fall into his snares.

3. Drowsiness, sloth, and a cool indifference in religious duties, are commonly forerunners of a great fall. It was so here with the unhappy disciples — This lethargic insensibility was succeeded by a hideous group of sins. Peter first defends his master with a sword, and then denies him; as for the other disciples, they all forsook him and fled. Spiritual anguish is a dangerous insinuating poison, which may so stupify the mind as to suffer it to go blindfold to destruction. When therefore we perceive any such disposition in ourselves, it should fill us with alarm and make us fearful lest we should have already entered on the path that will plunge us into perdition, unless we in time draw back from the precipice.

4. God's children seldom fall into any heinous sin, without having before experienced some singular visitations and awakenings of grace. He that stands in grace, and takes heed to his heart, must have observed, that the tempter never watches the mind more closely than after it has experienced some particular favour from God, and an uncommon fer-

vency in prayer, or in meditation on the Word. The fall of the disciples was now drawing very nigh ; but it was preceded by repeated visits from the Lord Jesus. Before Peter denied his Master three times, he had before been visited, awakened, and warned. Man must therefore be convinced that his fall is not to be imputed to God. He previously gives sufficient grace, he uses proper precautions for preserving a soul. Now, if a fall happens notwithstanding his care, we ourselves must bear witness that he was true, and that it is to ourselves, and not to Him, that we are to impute our ruin. Happy is he who makes a right use of the visitations of grace, which usually precede temptation.

II. As to the speech of our blessed Saviour, now visiting his disciples, it is addressed in the first place in particular to Peter, and then to the other disciples in general.

The particular address to Peter is this : ‘ Simon ! sleepest thou ? ’ Peter had, above all the rest of the disciples, made a show of great courage and resolution, and had promised that with Christ he would go to prison and to death. The Lord Jesus therefore first turns to him, and puts him in mind that this lethargic drowsiness little agreed with his sanguine promise, and that he set but a very indifferent example to the rest of his brethren. As if he had said, “ Ah ! wretched Simon, where will this end ? If thou canst not, for my sake, break thy natural rest a little, how wilt thou lay down thy life for me ? If thou art not faithful in matters of small consequence, how wilt thou be faithful in those of greater moment ? ” But it is remarkable, that Christ, in this address, uses the name Simon instead of that of Peter. When, by his glorious confession of Christ, (in Matt. xvi.) he had shewn himself as a firm, unshaken rock, Christ had conferred on him the name of Peter or Cephas ; whereas now, in this specimen of his sluggishness and

carnal indolence, he calls him by his own name Simon, in order to make the reproof the keener. Hence let us learn,

1. That the greater assurances and promises we have given to Christ of our fidelity, the more sensible reproaches must we expect from him if we do not acquit ourselves accordingly. The arrows of Christ's reproof are chiefly pointed at Peter, who had given him the greatest assurances of fidelity. This method our blessed Lord constantly observes in his proceedings with men. Of him who has promised much, much will be required; and if it be not performed, the reproaches and clamours of conscience will be the more importunate. Let us now reflect how many assurances of our obedience we have given to Christ in the course of our lives, from our baptism to this time, in our prayers, in our confessions, in our sicknesses, &c. And how few of those promises we have fulfilled? Whither shall we fly to save ourselves from shame and grief, when our conscience shall set our perfidy and baseness before our eyes.

2. Whoever cannot deny himself in small matters, will be much less able to do it in those of greater consequence. This our blessed Lord here intimates to his drowsy disciple, by reproaching him with his sleep. This truth every one may be well assured of. For instance, he that cannot bear a frown, a hard word, a reproachful name, for the sake of Christ, will hardly stand his ground when he is called upon to lay down his life for the sake of his gospel. We should therefore strenuously inure ourselves to smaller things, that the greater may be the lighter to us.

3. By our indolence and sloth we may deprive ourselves of several advantages in our religious progress, which we had before acquired. Simon now, for a time, forfeits, by his sluggish drowsiness, the glorious surname of a rock. Hence it is said in scripture;

‘Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.’ (Rev. iii. 11. xvi. 15.)

As to the speech addressed to the disciples in general then present, it contains,

1. A reproach. ‘Could ye then not watch with me one hour?’ In Mark, these words are indeed spoken to Peter; but this is easily reconciled with St. Matthew’s account. Undoubtedly his eyes were fixed on St. Peter; but he speaks to all the other disciples, and upbraids them with their sleepiness, ‘had ye then not strength enough (as the Greek word signifies,) to watch with me one hour?’ You have arrogated to yourselves sufficient strength and resolution to die with me; (Matt. xxvi. 35.) and now ye have shewn, that ye have not strength enough to watch with me one hour. Formerly, when employed with your nets, you would pass whole nights without closing your eyes; (Luke v. 5.) but now you are to watch with me, you are overpowered with sleep. This reproof is still the keener, as if our blessed Lord had said, “You have not been able to watch one fleeting hour, and that with me, your Lord and Master, whom on account of so many kindnesses received, and such affectionate love and tenderness, you are bound faithfully to assist in this extreme anguish.” Should a servant lay himself down on his pillow, and indulge himself in sleep, when his master, by reason of some difficulties and dangers, was obliged to watch all the night, would not every one cry out shame on such a sluggard?

2. An admonition, with proper motives.

The admonition is ‘watch and pray,’ watch with your heart and eyes, pray with your heart and mouth. The one must rule and animate the other. By watching, the snares of the devil are observed and avoided; by praying we betake ourselves under the wings of divine Providence. By the former, the danger is discovered; the latter, assistance is obtained against

it. Therefore Christ recommends both duties to his disciples who were sleepy and indolent; as if he had said, What is past shall be forgiven you; but for the future be more cautious, and amend. To the admonition are annexed two motives.

The first is taken from the greatness of the danger, 'that ye enter not into temptation.' A great temptation was now approaching them; (Matt. xxvi. 31.) a trial in which they were to give a proof of their fidelity to their Lord and Master, and put in practice that lesson, which they had hitherto been learning in his school. As this trial now approached nearer and nearer, they were by watching and praying to be on their guard, that they might not be hemmed in by the temptation as in a prison. For we cannot always obtain by our prayers, that the temptation shall not overtake us. (James i. 2, 3.) Were we not assailed by trials, we should be strangers to our strength or weakness. But by prayer obtain, that we may not incur the divine displeasure, so as to be overcome by them. This Christ has taught us in the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer; on which our Saviour throws a light here, as third petition was before illustrated by the great example of the Son of God.

The second motive is taken from their weakness and inability. Our blessed Lord allows, that in them 'the spirit is willing;' he grants that it was their real intention faithfully and courageously to stand by him. This integrity of their hearts he owns to be entirely a work of the Holy Spirit, though, on their side mixed with much alloy. But at the same time our blessed Lord puts them in mind that 'the flesh is weak.' They had still in them the corrupt nature which loves itself, and is frequently for preserving itself in an illicit manner; which lags behind when the spirit precedes with willingness and vigour, but cannot lead it according to its wish. Thus their intention in-

deed was good ; but their own natural strength unable to execute it : They stood in need of divine succour, which they were to obtain by vigilance and prayer. This is briefly the sense of the words ; from which we may draw the following inferences :

1. That the heart of man is so deeply immersed in corruption, that it is too much inclined to sloth and indolence, not only under the enjoyment of God's favour, but also under his chastisements. These three disciples had before fallen asleep on mount Tabor, (Luke ix. 32.) and now also in the garden of Gethsemane. Alas ! is it not lamentable that we should be so addicted to sloth and heaviness, that neither the exuberant mercy of God, nor our own distress, can chase away the sleep from our eyes.

2. Even the most innocent behaviour may be sinful at an improper time and place. Who will say that sleep in itself is a sin ? The night was appointed for man to rest. However, as this was not a proper place and time, the disciples are justly reproached for indulging it. Therefore let it not be boldly objected, What harm is there in it ? before all the circumstances are duly weighed. Even prayer itself may be a sin, if performed at a time when an occasion calls upon us to do some work of charity to our neighbour, which is obstinately omitted for the sake of prayer, and he is suffered to perish through our neglect.

3. In strong temptations, the surest preservative is vigilance joined with prayer. Hereby the sting of the temptation is blunted, and the enemy effectually disarmed. Hence St. Paul, among other parts of the spiritual armour, recommends prayer, ' Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.' (Eph. vi. 18.) If we were more careful to use this heavenly weapon, the enemy would not obtain so many victories over us ; but we run to and fro, and seek

foreign assistance, whilst these domestic means, prescribed by the Supreme Physician, are too often despised and rejected.

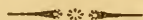
4. In our conflicts against sin, it is not a good intention that determines the issue ; but the real power to resist them must be obtained by prayer. Man, elevated with his own abilities, conceits himself to be a hero, if he does but form a good resolution ; but when he sets out relying on his own strength, without an humble acknowledgment of his weakness, nor seeking to God for assistance, he is overcome before he is aware. Hence it was with too much reason, that Luther said, ‘ the road to hell is paved with good resolutions.’

5. The weakness of flesh and blood should not induce us to look on Christianity as impracticable, but rather drive us to prayer for obtaining divine assistance. These words of Christ, ‘ the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,’ are greatly mistaken and abused. The world make use of this saying, to excuse themselves from watching and praying ; whereas it is because the flesh is weak, that Christ exhorts us to watch and pray. Others look on all their premeditated sins as mere weaknesses of the flesh, which, however, they think, may be accompanied by the willingness of the spirit, only because they sometimes have transitory intervals of fervour and devotion ; and thus they go on in their fatal security.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour ! who, like a watchful shepherd, visited in mercy thy careless sheep, and warnest them of their approaching danger ; may we, when inclined to sloth, hear thy pastoral care calling out in the ears of every drowsy disciple, Watch and pray ! Grant to every one of us a sufficient knowledge of his inability and weakness, that he may not rely on

his good intentions, nor account himself stronger than he really is, but rather be diligent in prayer for obtaining the friendship of a more powerful ally, and by his strength be conqueror in all things. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VII.

THE DISCIPLES VISITED A SECOND TIME AFTER
OUR SAVIOUR'S SECOND PRAYER.

‘AND he went away again the second time, and prayed, and spake the same words: O my Father! if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy, neither wist they what to answer him.’ (Matt. xxvi. 42, 43. Mark xiv. 39, 40. Luke xxii. 42.)

Here is described the continuance of the internal sufferings of Christ, and,

First, the repetition of his prayer;

Secondly, his coming back to his disciples.

I. As to the repetition of the prayer by our Saviour in his agonizing conflict, it is both described, and related.

The description of it is in these words, and ‘he went away again, and prayed.’ This going away refers to what had been said before, ‘he came to his disciples.’ Having awakened them from their sleep, and exhorted them to watch and pray; he again went some paces from them, and a second time sought a retired, solitary spot. For what end does he retire? It is to pray. He went away from his disciples; but he went to his Father. Again he prostrates himself before the throne of the Supreme Judge, and pours out into his Father’s bosom the sighs of his oppressed spirit, his throbbing heart. This was done ‘again the second time,’ as the Greek expresses it. One

of the two words had been sufficient ; but St. Matthew designedly uses this seemingly redundancy of expression, in order to command our attention more carefully to the repetition of the former prayer. As if he had said, "Observe, christian reader, and carefully mind, how often Christ prays. It is now the second time that he supplicates for an alleviation of his agony. Think then how hard his dreadful conflict was !" This description offers to us the following truths :

1. Prayer must be continued without ceasing ; and notwithstanding our request be not granted, we are yet to persevere in it. What our blessed Saviour taught, namely, 'that men should always pray and not faint (Luke xviii. 1.),' he has here himself confirmed by his illustrious example. He had already once prayed, that the duration of his inward sufferings might be shortened ; but receiving no answer, as if heaven had been shut against him ; that does not discourage him from renewing his address. And when he obtains no answer even the second time, he returns to prayer a third time. By this his frequent repetition, he has acquired for us the privilege of making repeated supplications to God for the same favour ; whereas, without this merit of the Mediator, we could not have presumed to open our mouth again, after the Supreme Majesty of Heaven had shewn no inclination to grant us our prayer.— With what reverence does Abraham address the Divine Being, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak !' (Gen. xviii. 30, 32.) but now through Christ we may venture on this duty, and boldly approach the throne of Grace. We now have not only obtained through him the privilege of unwearied perseverance in prayer, but it is likewise become our duty ; and that not only in prayers which we may offer without reserve, but likewise in such circumstances when we are not absolutely

to desire any particular thing, if we are assured that they are not contrary to the Divine will; for of this kind was our Saviour's prayer. Let us then make use of this glorious privilege; let us by our importunity, as it were, do a holy violence to heaven; and though our prayers are not immediately heard, let us not be weak in faith; but like the woman of Canaan, let us cry after the Lord, until he shews us a token of his mercy.

2. In every act of prayer, the heart must be turned aside from all the creatures, and directed to God alone. This is intimated in the words 'he went away and prayed.' Where the first expression denotes the turning aside from men; and second, drawing near to God. If the confidence of the heart be reposed in the creatures, and comfort and assistance be expected from them only, to call upon God for help is a mere mockery of the Divine Majesty. He will have the honour of being our only God and deliverer, and the only object of our confidence. 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.' In every prayer therefore we must always have in our mind the first commandment, namely, 'Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.'

As to the substance of the second prayer, it occurs,

First, in general; for St. Mark tells us, 'He spake the same words.' Our blessed Lord does not go about to make any elegant change in the words; but, by constantly retaining the same expressions, he intended to shew his fixed and unchangeable desire. Thus a Christian, when under severe temptations, may be reduced to such a want of words, to express his desires, as to have nothing remaining but the continual repetition of a feeble, but prevailing sigh. For when we pray, we must not think by the dint of eloquence to persuade, or impose on an omniscient God; but humility, and poverty of spirit, are the most

powerful orators for prevailing on God to help us in time of need. What comfort must it be to a Christian under temptation, to reflect that even his inarticulate sighs and inward groanings are accepted by his Heavenly Father, who perfectly knows his wants.

Secondly, St. Matthew relates the very words of this second prayer; whence we see that they are exactly of the same import with the first, though the prayer does not consist of just the same number of words. His words, are, 'Oh, my Father, If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.' That Christ by the cup did not mean his whole approaching Passion, but only his present agony and inward sense of the divine displeasure; and by the passing away of the cup, prayed that his internal agony might be shortened and mitigated; has been shewn at large in the fourth and fifth considerations. From this circumstance we may learn the following truths:

1. Though we receive a denial from God, yet are we not to cease from acknowledging him to be our Father. Christ had already prayed once in vain; nevertheless he renews his prayer with the endearing appellation of Abba, Father. We may learn of our blessed Saviour to retain a filial confidence in God, and acknowledge him as our dear Father, though our peevish flesh and blood would persuade us, that he is changed from a tender parent to an incensed judge.

2. In persevering in prayer, we are always to shew an humble resignation to the good pleasure of God. In this second prayer of the Lord Jesus, there appears still a greater degree of resignation and sacrifice of his own will to his Father's, than in the first.—There it is said, 'If it be possible, remove this cup from me;' but here, 'If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done'. Thus in the continuance of his prayer, his resignation in-

creased ; and thus it must be with us. When we first form a wish for a thing, and would request it of God, the mind generally, in the beginning, obstinately persists in its desires. But God in his faithfulness, and pity to our frailties, does not immediately grant us what we desire. In the mean time, this vehement desire cools a little ; our will is brought into a better disposition, and submits itself to the divine will ; and when we can say, ' Thy will be done,' then God vouchsafes to hear us.

3. Every new assault of a temptation must be succeeded by a new offering of the will to God ; and then victory will crown our endeavours. It was so with our blessed Saviour here. And now, when the furious storm of the dread of God's wrath assaulted him anew, he again resigns himself to the divine will, concluding with ' thy will be done.' In which words he not only submits to bear what could not be avoided, this being little more than a philosophical resignation, but even acquiesces in it with his whole heart. So must it be with us Christians. Every conflict must be followed with a fresh victory, recovering ourselves from every combat with greater glory and resignation. But this could never have taken place, had not Christ by his victory obtained strength to enable us to do it.

4. When we resign ourselves to the divine will without any reserve, we are most sure to be delivered from our trouble. Of this we see an instance in our blessed Saviour ; he was taken from prison and from judgment. (Isaiah liii. 8.) But how does he behave under those afflictive circumstances ? He prays, saying, ' Thy will be done.' This was, as it were, the bridge on which he passed over the torrent of anguish and sorrow. Thus it fares also with his followers. A passage will certainly open itself, if we from our hearts, in time of distress, say, ' Lord, thy will be done'. For the will of God does not intend our de-

struction, but our preservation. God, who permits us to be tempted, will make a way to escape, (1 Cor. x. 13.) and open a pleasing vista of hope through the gloomy vale of sufferings.

II. After this second offering of his will to his Father, follows his second coming to his disciples, in which we are to consider,

First, This coming: 'He came again.' After providing for his own affairs, which, indeed, were likewise the universal concern of the whole race of mankind, he returns again to his disciples. Christ is here also found in form and fashion as a man. Persons under great troubles and afflictions go to and fro; set about one thing, and then another; and cannot stay long in the same place, as we see in the instance of Jacob when he was afraid of falling into his brother Esau's hands. (Gen. xxxii. 7. 22, 23.) All these actions of feeble humanity Christ took on himself, yet without sin; and sanctified them in his own sacred person. However, it was not only on account of his own trouble and anguish, but likewise from a tender love for his dear disciples, that he went so often to inform himself of their condition.

Secondly, The condition of those he went to was again very wretched. He found them again sleeping. The Holy Ghost intimates something, as it were, by way of extenuation of their fault, and what may serve for an excuse: 'For their eyes were heavy,' or weighed down with sleep. Sleep and fatigue had so overpowered them, that when they were roused from their lethargy, they could not rightly recollect themselves. They had no power to exert their faculties. Sorrow had clouded their minds; the load with which they were oppressed so tied up their faculties that they could not obey the will. Therefore, as St. Mark adds, 'They wist not what to answer him.' Hence it appears, that our blessed Lord this time also spoke to them, and animated them to prayer and

watchfulness. But it was with them as with persons awakened out of a deep sleep, who generally speak at random. It may easily be supposed, with what pity and compassion the blessed Jesus beheld this melancholy scene. Therefore we do not read of any harsh reprimands in this place, as their misery was before his eyes; so that in this circumstance also Christ acts up to the prophecy of Isaiah, 'a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.' (Isaiah xliii. 3.) Hence we may draw the following conclusions:

1. To indulge one's conveniency and ease, at a time when Christ is suffering and struggling under calamities, in his members, is very unbecoming a Christian. How base and disingenuous is it for the disciples to be asleep, when their Lord and Master is under the most painful agonizing trials. Now, indeed, he no longer suffers in his own person; but in his mystical body, and in his members, he is often afflicted and distressed. These sleepy disciples represent such careless persons, as do not lay to heart the sufferings of the oppressed church militant. St. Paul, on the contrary, calls upon us to 'remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them who suffer adversity as being ourselves also in the body.' (Heb. xiii. 3.) 'Dost thou dwell in a house of cedar?' Reflect with David, 'That the ark of the Lord dwelleth within curtains.' (2 Sam. vii. 2.) Hast thou rest from all thy enemies? Yet in spirit go with the remaining host of God into the field. Shew thyself a man among those, who must be continually assaulted, but not overpowered, by the gates of hell. Does the world caress thee? Think that thy brethren meet with the worst usage from that false friend. If the daughter of Pharaoh owns thee for her son, refuse that honour, and choose rather to bear the reproach of Christ, and to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a

season. (Heb. xi. 24.) In a word, by all means take care, that thou be not of those whom the prophet describes, saying, 'They lie upon beds of ivory—and are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.' (Amos vi. 4.)

2. The more we give way to spiritual sloth, the greater troubles the soul generally involves itself in. The disciples, who had not roused themselves at Christ's first exhortation, became the more drowsy, and sunk in a deeper sleep. It is more necessary and incumbent upon us to check spiritual sloth in its beginnings, than any other sin. Sloth, and a disinclination to good, insinuates itself like an intoxicating poison; which, being once tasted, a man finds that he has taken an opiate, which gradually deprives him of all thought and reflection.

3. Under temptations, the effects of trouble, and the workings of natural corruption, are carefully to be distinguished. We see that the Holy Spirit here describes the melancholy condition of the sleepy disciples with great compassion. 'Their eyes were heavy;' and they had an oppressive load at the heart. The like apology occurs also in another place, 'Sorrow hath filled your hearts.' (John xvi. 6.) Here Christ attributes their sleepiness to sorrow; and pities his disciples, for 'he knew their frame.' (Psalm ciii. 14.) He could distinguish the workings of sorrow from the workings of sin and wickedness. On the contrary, the accuser confounds all together, and would suggest other causes to a troubled mind; which fasten the more easily on it, when sinking under trials, and oppressed with sorrow. When it sees that the men of this world have seemingly a happier portion, it is apt to say to itself, "Have these men a more pure and easy conscience than I? Alas! all things are not right with me." These are severe trials, in which our merciful High Priest will interfere for our deliverance. From him also a minister

of the gospel must learn, how to deal with such afflicted souls in prudence ; not bruising them by an unseasonable harshness and severity, but raising them up by gentle means and a well grounded comfort. However, let us seriously reflect, that if sorrow and trouble can so hood-wink the mind, what must the tyrannizing dominion of sin do !

THE PRAYER.

O MERCIFUL Jesus, thou faithful high priest, who treatest thy feeble patients with such lenity and compassion. To thee we lament, that our corrupt nature is so inclined and eager to sin, but so slow to do good, that we often leave thee praying and sorrowing, whilst we in the mean time indulge ourselves with indolence and sleep. In thy tender mercy, be thou pleased not only to forgive us this neglect, but also, by the great fervour thou hast shewn in prayer, to animate our hearts with devotion ; by thy persevering constancy, impart to us also a continual perseverance in prayer ; and by the often repeated sacrifice of thy will, powerfully incline our stubborn wills into an entire obedience and submission. Grant this for the sake of thy sufferings. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VIII.

CHRIST'S AGONY AND CONFLICT.

‘ AND he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words : Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly ; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.’ (Matt. xxvi. 44. Luke xxii. 42, 43, 44.)

Here is described the third part of our Saviour's conflict, in which we may observe, first, the repetition of the prayer, with Christ's preparation for it, and the contents of it. Secondly, his being strengthened by an angel. Thirdly, the increase of the agony, and in this a violent conflict; a fervent prayer; and a bloody sweat.

The circumstances of this transaction are so singular and interesting, that they do not occur again in the whole narrative of our Saviour's Passion; nor is a similar instance to be found in the whole Scriptures, or in any prophane history. Hence it may not be improper to treat of it in a method different from the preceding, to the end that this unparalleled circumstance may make the deeper impression on the reader's mind. We shall therefore go through this stupendous occurrence, according to the pious Bernard's direction, in an alternative of Meditation and Prayer; in order, at the same time, to exhibit a pattern, by which a Christian may discuss the whole history of our Saviour's Passion, in the most edifying and beneficial manner to himself. May the Lord grant us the spirit of wisdom and prayer for this undertaking!

MEDITATION.

As the blessed Jesus, at his second coming to his disciples, could not rouse them from sleep, it is at last said, 'and he left them.' A melancholy circumstance indeed! It was as if a skilful and good physician should sit down by the bed-side of a patient, and intreat him for his own sake to forbear a certain noxious kind of diet or regimen; but at length, finding him deaf to his kind precautions, he is obliged to go away and leave the obstinate patient to follow his destructive appetite. Alas! how desperate and fatal must be the disease, when this supreme physician of

souls gives over a diseased mind, being unable by any means to prevail on the obstinate sinner !

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus, preserve me from such a condition, in which all thy faithful admonitions and warnings are lost. In thy tender mercy forgive me, who have so often, during the course of my life, let thee knock at the door of my heart in vain ; and either have not admitted thee at all, or by my obstinacy and perverseness obliged thee to withdraw from me. Henceforth I will pay a greater regard to the awakening visits of thy grace, and every time with joy welcome thee, the blessed of the Lord.

MEDITATION.

Yet at the same time how comfortable is it, that though it be said, he left them, he did not, however, cast them away ? He still owns them as his dear disciples, and does not discontinue his solicitude and care for them. How faithful, how mild, how loving is the blessed Jesus, to have so much patience with such weak, indolent, and wretched offenders. !

PRAYER.

Thou mild, immaculate lamb of God ! let me be a witness of this thy lenity and patience. If I must feel the weakness and frailty of the flesh, and sink under the burden which I am to bear ; cast me not away in my weakness, but be always present with me, and in thy great patience and long-suffering, continue thy sacred influences on my soul.

MEDITATION.

‘ He went away again.’ But to whom did he go ? To his dear Father, who at present, as it were, hid his face from him ; but nevertheless was pleased with this his Son’s humble approach. Perhaps it would not

have been so with me. Had I prayed once or twice to no purpose, I know not whether I should have returned the third time to the throne of grace : But the Son of God was pleased by his humble and frequent returning, to atone for my imperfections in this particular.

PRAYER.

O blessed Lord and Saviour ! give me also such a holy constancy in prayer, that I may humbly knock at the door of grace time after time, and not so hastily take a denial of my suit. Henceforth I will say, with Jacob, ‘ I will not leave thee until thou bless me.’

MEDITATION.

‘ He prayed the third time.’ How carefully does the Spirit of God enumerate the precious sighs of our High Priest, which he poured forth in the extreme anguish of his soul into the bosom of his Father. This the Psalmist had predicted of the Messiah, when he introduces him speaking in this manner, ‘ Put my tears into thy bottle ; are they not in thy book ?’ (Psalm lvi. 3.) Alas ! my sighs are far inferior to the sighs of my Saviour ; but as he condescends to sanctify them by his intercession, so unquestionably will my Heavenly Father condescend to hear them, and note them in his book.

PRAYER.

O dearest Saviour ! may I send up my prayers incessantly to thee, since I know that they are so exactly noted in the book of thy remembrance. Are the hairs of my head counted, and wilt thou not much more take account of those sighs and tears which are produced by the Holy Spirit ?

MEDITATION.

The Lord Jesus prayed thrice, that the cup of his bitter mental sufferings might soon pass over. Paul likewise prayed thrice, that the messenger of satan might depart from him; and at last obtained for answer, that God's 'grace was sufficient for him.' (2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.)

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus! may I persevere unweariedly in prayer, without abating of my zeal. Grant me therefore fervour and attention in my prayers; and help me to ask until I receive, to seek until I find, to knock until it be opened unto me.

MEDITATION.

'And he spake the same words.' O how fixed and determined is the Lord Jesus in his prayer! The source of all true eloquence, who teaches men what they should say, who gives speech and wisdom to his disciples, continually uses the same form of words to petition his Heavenly Father.

PRAYER.

Thanks be to thee, O blessed Lord and Saviour, who by thy constancy in prayer didst atone for my inconstancy. When, oppressed with temptations, I shall be at such a loss for words as to have only one faint sigh remaining; let it be acceptable unto thee, and let thy spirit plead for me with sighs unutterable.

MEDITATION.

'And he said, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.' Ah, how bitter must be the dregs of that cup! since our blessed Lord prayed three times that it might be removed from him.

How dreadful must the sense of the divine anger be, when such amazing strength could not bear it without shuddering !

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus, how could I then have borne what thy human nature could scarcely bear ! Would not this load have pressed me down to the deepest abyss of hell, if thou hadst not in my stead taken it on thee, and borne its oppressive weight. Eternal thanks be ascribed to thee for drinking the dregs of the cup of God, that the pure and bright waters of his comfort might be plentifully poured into it for me. Thanks be to thee who didst sweeten the cup of my cross, and from thy sacred lips didst cause pure mercy abundantly to flow into it. Now will I also willingly take the cup of salvation, and call upon thy holy name.

MEDITATION.

‘ Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.’ This is now the third time that I hear the will of Christ, in his sinless human nature, humbly submitting itself to the will of God. How much more should I do so, who am infected with original and actual sin.

PRAYER.

O my Lord and Saviour, thanks and praise be to thee, who by the submission of thy will, hast acquired for me strength to break my stubborn will, and to triumph over the sinful motions of it. Thanks be to thee, who by thy meritorious victory hast so ordered it, that such evil motions shall not be imputed unto me.

MEDITATION.

‘ And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven.’ How must this angel be amazed at the low

abasement of his creator ! How must it have delighted him to have looked down on the deep humiliation of the Son of God ! With what humility must he have adored the purity and holiness of God, in this stupendous transaction !

PRAYER.

Blessed Jesus, as the angel with admiration delighted to behold thy stupendous love to mankind ; so grant that I may also with a holy complacency and desire, with the deepest humility and wonder, look into its amazing depth. May thy bitter passion be the constant subject of my meditations !

MEDITATION.¹

O how deeply do I here behold my Saviour abased ! and the Son of God here becomes less than the angels. The God of angels is immersed in sorrow ; and the angel of God comforts and supports him. The beloved Son is beaten ; and the servant binds up his wounds. Amazing and unheard of humiliation !

PRAYER.

O blessed Lord and Saviour ! Thou descendest so low in thy humiliation and abasement, that scarcely can my mind follow thee down the abyss. I stand afar off, and wonder at thy stupendous love, which has drawn thee into such a depth of misery. Praised be thy name, who was pleased to descend to such a lowly condition, as to stand in need of the consolation of an angel, that by thy merits I might enjoy the service and protection of those blessed Spirits, against the wiles and assaults of the spirit of darkness.

MEDITATION.

How faithful, how merciful, is God ! He proportions his reviving comforts to the degree of our sufferings. When the Lord Jesus had in the wilder-

ness gone through his conflict with satan, the angels came, and ministered unto him. (Matt. iv. 11.) Here, the encounter being sharper, and the struggle greater, an angel steps in during the conflict to strengthen and support him.

PRAYER.

O my Saviour ! Give me always such consolation and strength in my conflicts, that I may obtain the victory. When all the sons of men forsake me, let thy holy angels surround me, and thy blessed spirit assure me of thy love.

MEDITATION.

An angel strengthens my Saviour, undoubtedly by a consolatory discourse ; and a kind remonstrance. That it is the Father's will that he should drink this cup, who would soon place the crown of perfection upon his sufferings, and then he should again return to the bosom of his dear Father ; that his sufferings would be attended with the most transcendant and salutary effects, to the unspeakable glory of his Almighty Father, and the eternal salvation of an infinite number of souls. God undoubtedly accompanied these words of his refulgent messenger with such efficacy and power, that the human nature of our blessed Lord felt itself greatly and wonderfully strengthened by them,

PRAYER.

Thus, O my Saviour, let me never be without such pious souls who, under any difficulties into which I may fall, may support me by their consolatory discourse. Give to the words of thy consoling messengers such force and energy, that I may be sensible that thou hast sent them to strengthen and support my desponding courage,

MEDITATION.

This comfort administered to our blessed Lord appears to me, as it were, the granting of his prayer, and a gracious recompence of his preceding voluntary sacrifice of his own to the will of God ; which, like incense, had emitted a sweet savour before his Heavenly Father.

PRAYER.

May I, O blessed Jesus, be convinced by thy illustrious example, that it is not in vain to possess my soul in patience ; but that a new portion of grace follows every sacrifice of the will. Oh make me therefore more inclined to resign my will to thine, that I may give thee opportunity of multiplying thy refreshments to my soul,

MEDITATION.

The cup, indeed, was not quite removed from the blessed Jesus ; for the bitterest dregs of it are still reserved for him ; nevertheless his prayer was not ineffectual. For by the consolation of an angel, in the name of his Heavenly Father, he received a pledge, that he should not sink under the oppressive weight of his sufferings.

PRAYER.

May I, O my Saviour, be content, when, instead of what I ardently prayed for, something more beneficial is granted to me ; or when, instead of the whole I pray for, I receive only an earnest of thy favour. Let me always be satisfied with the present comforts, and patiently wait for farther relief.

MEDITATION.

Our blessed Lord is, indeed, strengthened for the present ; but it is in order to undergo greater and

more afflictive conflicts, that his human nature receives an increase of strength.

PRAYER.

Thus, O blessed Jesus, may I never desire additional strength of thee for any other end, than faithfully to exert it in severer trials; but by no means in order to shake off the cross; so that thy honour may be promoted by my being strengthened, and that thy name be more and more glorified by my patience under afflictions.

MEDITATION.

‘And being in agony.’ O what a dreadful spectacle offers itself here to my eyes! Life struggles with death; and not only with temporal death, that not being yet inflicted; but with eternal death, armed with the wrath of God, terrors of the Almighty, and accompanied by all the malignant powers of darkness. Astonishing combat! in which the curse of the law, and Christ’s innocence; the manifestation of the divine justice incensed, and the display of the divine love softened with pity; the rage of satan, and the Deity united to the soul of Christ, are engaged in opposition to each other.

PRAYER.

O Lord and Saviour! my hearing and my sight fail me to recount thy sufferings. As every sin deserves death, and thou hadst the intolerable weight of thousands of millions of sin, the sins of the whole world, pressing upon thy soul; so must thou here, before the righteous tribunal of God, have endured many thousands of millions of deaths. I behold thee, the beloved son of the Heavenly Father, overwhelmed with all the vials of God’s wrath; by which thy tender humanity is thrown into such a violent agony, that it appears to be in the excruciating pangs and extre-

mities of death. Oh what an accursed evil must sin be, to throw thy spotless soul into such an abyss of misery !

MEDITATION.

What dreadful effects has the sentence of death been frequently known to have upon the heart of an unhappy criminal ? How he turns pale, trembles, and is exanimated with fear and distraction ! How superlatively dreadful then must it have been to the guiltless soul of our Saviour, when all the torture, anguish, and pain ; all the curses and agonizing torments, denounced by the law against the sins of the whole world, were inflicted on this sacred victim.

PRAYER.

Eternal praise be ascribed to thee, O dearest mediator, for permitting thyself to be most heavily accused by the law before the just tribunal of God, and to be condemned as the vilest malefactor. When Moses accuses my whole life, and in his terrible effulgency denounces condemnation ; let this thy atoning conflict preserve me against the curse of the law. As thou hast taken on thee my curse, so let thy blessing descend on my guilty head.

MEDITATION.

The awful peals of thunder, and dreadful flashes of lightning in the atmosphere ; and the hideous yells and roaring of lions on the earth ; are the two terrifying images in nature, under which the most high has been pleased to represent his wrath in holy writ.— (Job xl. 9. Amos i. 2. iii. 8.) But if all the terrible claps of thunder that ever assaulted the ear were to burst at one horrid explosion, with combined force ; and were all the lions of the forest to set up a hideous roar, at once, after their prey ; it were not to be compared with the dreadful display of the wrath

of God, which here overwhelmed the soul of Christ. The most terrifying actions of these formidable creatures exhibit but a faint and fleeting shadow of the infinite wrath of their omnipotent creator.

PRAYER.

O infinite love ! What endless thanks do I owe thee for thy severe conflict with the wrath of God, that I might not be an everlasting sacrifice to that consuming fire ? Ever will I adore and extol thee for this unspeakable benefit, and continually from thee alone seek an exemption from the fierce anger of the Lord.

MEDITATION.

In this dreadful encounter, the devil may be supposed to have exerted his utmost efforts against the guiltless soul of our blessed Lord ; but the divinity which dwelt in this sacred person would not suffer his human nature, the bride which he had personally espoused, to be trodden under foot by the prince of darkness. Though satan discharged whole showers of fiery darts against his soul ; yet his divinity extracted all their poison, and rendered their stroke ineffectual. At the same time, he so disappointed the infernal rage of the powers of darkness, that henceforth none of the envenomed darts of hell will be able to destroy the invulnerable souls of believers.

PRAYER.

Unfeigned thanks be ascribed to thee, O most mighty ; who, in this encounter, hast deprived the armed strong man (who had the power of death,) of his strength, and effectually disarmed the evil one.—Evermore preserve me, that I may no longer ingloriously serve a tyranizing enemy, over whom thou hast gained so glorious, so painful a victory ; but may acknowledge thee my victorious Redeemer, for my only Lord and Master.

MEDITATION.

Undoubtedly this agony of our Lord was increased by his tender, his inexpressible concern for the loss of so many thousands of souls, who, the divinity of Christ foresaw, would give themselves up to the enemy of God and man, and tread under foot the precious blood by which they were purchased and redeemed. Should a good king, in order to free his subjects from a miserable slavery, engage in a bloody war, in which he was generously to lay down his life ; and should yet foresee that, out of a thousand groaning in captivity, scarce ten would consent to be freed from chains and wretchedness, but would rather choose to continue in slavery for ever ; would not this affect his generous and heroic soul more than all the dangers, to which he was going to be exposed for their sake ?

PRAYER.

O my Saviour, how unmeasurably great must thy love have been? when, though thou didst foresee the ingratitude of so many souls who would voluntarily run into perdition, wast still resolved to accomplish the painful work of our redemption. O preserve me that this thine agonizing conflict may not be lost to my soul !

MEDITATION.

‘ And he prayed more earnestly,’ or properly, ‘ more intensely.’ Amazing resolution ! As the agony increases, the more humbly I see my Saviour approach the supreme tribunal of God’s justice. The former part of his conflict was something less violent ; but this was accompanied with an actual overwhelming of all his powers. The deeper his soul was to sink into sufferings, the more it laboured and exerted itself.

PRAYER.

Teach me, O Lord. to imitate this wisdom, that under my greatest sufferings I may prostrate myself in prayer. Do thou animate my devotion when it begins to cool, and by the unutterable groanings of thy spirit, support me ; that with the humble assault of sighs and tears I may take heaven, as it were, by violence.

MEDITATION.

‘And his sweat was as great drops of blood.’ What a supernatural anguish, what agonizing sorrow, must that have been, which caused such a supernatural sweat. Thou God, in the ordinary course of nature, has so constituted the human frame, that on any great anguish of mind, and sudden alarm of fear, the blood impetuously flows to the heart ; yet in this instance such is the power of the extreme agony under which the soul of Christ was labouring, that it not only drives the purple stream of life from its receptacle, the heart ; but, contrary to the course of nature, bursts the veins, lacerates the pores, and forces a thick grumous blood to issue from every part of the body ; which, being immediately congealed by the coldness of the night, falls, as it were, in great sanguine clots to the ground.

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus ! I here behold in thee wonders beyond my comprehension. Far be it from me, to give the reins to my presumptuous reason, that it should commit any offence against those dear, those precious drops, and depreciate thy agonizing bloody sweat. Rather will I abhor the greatness of my sins, which occasioned thee such an unparalleled anguish : I will, with thankfulness, admire the ardour of thy redeeming love, which made thy blood so ready to be shed, that it prevents the soldiers’ sacrilegious hands,

and forces itself a way through the veins and pores, before thy wounds were opened to give it vent.—Amazing love! Unexampled generosity!

MEDITATION.

‘And they fell on the ground.’ Alas! shall such precious drops fall to the ground? O let us spread our expanded hearts to receive them, that they may be moistened with this sacred, this heavenly dew! Let us sprinkle the posts of our doors with this blood of the Lamb of God, that the destroying angel may pass over them without hurting or annoying us.

PRAYER.

O My Saviour, in thee I have redemption, and in thy blood the forgiveness of sins. Thou hast rolled thy garments in blood, that in this free and perennial fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, my sins which are as scarlet, may be washed as white as snow. Thanks be to thee for this unspeakable benefit!

MEDITATION.

The commission of sin drew on the first Adam this fatal sentence, ‘In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread;’ but the expiation of sin drew on the second Adam such labour and anguish, that his whole body was bathed in a sweat of blood.

PRAYER.

In this thy bloody sweat, O blessed Jesus, wash my soul when it is to pass into the gulf of eternity; when agonizing pangs shall seize my body, and the cold faint sweat of death shall issue at every pore, then O thou great angel of the covenant, which thou hast sealed with thy precious blood, come to my aid, and with the sweat that flowed in sanguine torrents, strengthen me in my last tremendous hour. Amen. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IX.

JESUS COMES THE THIRD TIME TO HIS DISCIPLES.

‘AND when he rose up from prayer, and came to his disciples the third time, he found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said unto them, Will ye yet sleep, and take your rest? Why sleep ye? Behold the hour is come; and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go! Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand. Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.’ (Matt. xxvi. 45, 46. Mark xiv. 41, 42. Luke xxii. 45, 46.)

First, His coming.

Secondly, The condition in which he found his disciples.

Thirdly, His discourse to them.

I. As to his coming it is said,

1. ‘He rose up from prayer.’ Here it is presupposed that he offered up his prayer in a prostrate or kneeling posture. And indeed in his first prayer we are told, that ‘He kneeled down, and fell with his face on the ground;’ so that we may reasonably conclude, that in this last and sorest conflict, when he prayed with all his powers on the stretch, he would much more throw himself into the most lowly posture, and prostrate himself before his righteous Father. From this humble attitude of body he now rises, and thus suspends the external prayer; though he still perseveres in the inward offering up of the heart, which is the life and soul of prayer.

2. ‘He came to his disciples.’ By the disciples are here, first, to be understood the three whom he had admitted to be something nearer his sacred person, as witnesses of his agonizing conflict; but in this last returning to them, as his enemies were now

at hand, he undoubtedly went also to the other disciples, and awakened them from their sleep. O what a true Shepherd is he, who, in the midst of his bitterest agonies, retains a tender concern for his poor defenceless sheep. In the preceding Considerations, several truths have been already deduced from these words; yet are they very far from being exhausted. Should they indeed occur much oftener, some gleanings of instruction would be still remaining. The following doctrines may therefore be further deduced from them.

1. A Christian must not give himself up to prayer, so as to neglect the duties of love to his neighbour. Christ, the completest pattern of all virtues, has not only, by the punctual regularity and fervour which he observed in prayer, atoned for the wandering and coldness of our petitions; but has likewise left an example for our right conduct in prayer, and the love of our neighbour. He prayed when it was necessary, and when necessity required, he gave over. Thus from his great example we are to learn, how to separate and unite prayer and our avocations.

2. When we have received grace and strength from God in prayer, we ought also to make our neighbours partakers of it. Christ in his prayer being strengthened by an angel, is also for strengthening and animating his disciples. The strength which we collect in prayer, we are chiefly to make use of for our own confirmation, and to prepare for a fresh conflict, as the Lord Jesus had done before; but some of it we must also communicate to our weak brethren; for by such a faithful use of our spiritual strength, it will receive an abundant increase.

3. Inward trials and temptations ought not to render us self-conceited, morose, and careless of our neighbour's welfare. The blessed Jesus had, in his inward sufferings, enough to struggle with himself, as the prodigious load of the sins of the whole world,

and of the wrath of God, was laid on his sacred shoulders; yet we see that he does not lay aside all care and solicitude for his disciples, but 'having loved his own, he loveth them unto the end.'

4. After exerting our faith in prayer, there can be no better employment than that in which love is exercised. This we observe practised by our Lord Jesus Christ, not only in this instance, but on other occasions; as after praying, he delivers Peter and the other disciples from their fear and danger in the storm, (Matt. xiv. 23, &c.) After praying, (Luke ix. 29.) he heals the lunatic, (verse 37.) Here Christ is to be considered both as our reconciler, expiating our dissipation after prayer, and as the great exemplar whom we are to imitate.

II. As to the condition of his disciples, 'he found them sleeping for sorrow.' This sleep, considered merely as taking their rest, was more unbecoming than the former; as during this last sleep, happened our blessed Lord's severest agony, in which he had prayed so intensely, and sweated great drops of blood, whilst they were buried in sleep and indolence. This sleep therefore, upon this supposition, well deserved a sharp reproof. But it is again said by the Holy Spirit, as it were, by way of excuse, 'he found them sleeping for sorrow.' Though sorrow usually drives away sleep, (as Christ by his extreme sorrow and anguish had no inclination to close his eyes,) yet men may be so overpowered by grief as to dose into slumbers. Let this circumstance teach us the following particulars.

1. Christ in his severest sufferings, his bitterest anguish, was left without help or comfort by his best friends, in order to expiate the excessive confidence, which we in our distress place in men, and especially our friends and relations. This was indeed no small aggravation of the sufferings of Christ, that in his great agony he had not only no conversation with, and comfort from his disciples, but likewise found, that

all admonitions to rouse and awake them were to no purpose. By this he intended to expiate the excessive and idolatrous confidence which we, in our troubles, are apt to place in the creatures, as friends, patrons, &c. and to administer comfort to those, who in their streights find them without any human succour, on the compassion of others.

2. Our merciful High Priest patiently bears with our weakness, when we are overpowered with some violent affliction; but this indulgence we are not to abuse, nor obstinately indulge melancholy and dejection.

The disciples, indeed, are compassionately excused, because they slept for sorrow; yet did they not go without a reproof, 'Why sleep ye?' For they did not strive against the sorrow with which they were surrounded; but, as it were, gave themselves up without resistance, and suffered their faculties to be bound up by it. On the contrary, the more violent the onsets of sorrow were on the soul of our blessed Lord, the more earnestly he prays, and the greater his struggles.

III. Our blessed Saviour's words, at his coming the third time to his disciples, contain,

1. A reproof: 'Will ye still sleep and take your rest? &c.' As if he had said, Will you sleep away the small remainder of time left you for securing your souls? At another time I willingly left you to your sleep, and to take your natural rest; but now the time is too precious for indulgence in sleep. Now, as you see me struggling and bleeding with agony, it becomes you to drive away sleep from your eyes, and be vigilant. Therefore arise, why sleep ye?

2. He gives a proper notice of the approaching danger; which at first was intimated in general, 'The hour is come,' namely, that hour which the Heavenly Father has appointed for my sufferings; the hour, which I told you of before, is now come.

What then is to happen in this hour? ‘Behold! the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.’ By the word Behold, our blessed Saviour intends to open their eyes, that were heavy with sleep, and to rouse their attention to the danger which was before them. But what were they to see? The Son of Man was to be delivered up. In the present low state of his humiliation, the blessed Jesus terms himself the Son of Man, as he had several times before. The Son of Man (says he) will be actually delivered into the hands of sinners. By sinners we are to understand, not only the Roman and Pagan soldiers, but likewise all those into whose hands Christ was to be given up. For he was first delivered up to the Jewish priests, who, having pronounced the sentence of Death on him, delivered him up to Pilate, in order to be crucified by wicked hands. Hitherto Christ had stood as a miserable sinner before the supreme tribunal of God’s justice; now was he also to be delivered into the hands of men.

But our blessed Lord particularly adds, ‘Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand.’ By this betrayer he means the perfidious Judas, but without mentioning his name. Our Saviour is by his Heavenly Father given up to this traitor, who afterwards delivered him up into the hands of sinners. He was now at hand, on the way; coming on at the head of the officers of justice, and the soldiers, in search of Jesus, in order to deliver him into their hands, in return for the thirty pieces of silver which he had received as the reward of his perfidy. After this follows,

3. A twofold exhortation,

The first is, ‘Rise up, let us go!’ By these words, the Lord Jesus shews his willingness to present himself to his enemies, according to the known decree of his Father’s sacred will. Here is displayed the strength which he had derived from prayer, in willingly submitting to the severe sufferings, which now

presented themselves to his view. As our blessed Saviour was going to the Mount of Olives, he says, 'Arise, let us go hence,' (John xiv. 31.) And now, when he is going out of the garden to undergo his external sufferings, he uses a similar expression, 'Arise, let us be going.'

The second exhortation is, 'Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' This warning, which Christ had before repeated, and which has been also illustrated, he again, for the last time, proclaims in their ears. As the temptation had now opened its tremendous jaws to devour them, he would have them arm themselves with prayer, and by this means secure themselves against a surprise. Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. The neglect of a duty, or the commission of a sin, is the greater and more culpable, at a time when it is most incumbent on us to exert ourselves. The disciples' sleep, during Christ's former conflicts, was not without sin; but to sleep when he was in his agonizing bloody sweat, and when the danger was just at hand, was much more criminal. Hence the blessed Jesus says, 'Will ye still sleep?' Rioting, gluttony, and drunkenness, are at all times very heinous sins, which exclude men from the kingdom of God, (Gal. v. 21) but the guilt of them is aggravated when committed by one, whom his character and office obliges to be careful, to be sober, and to walk unblamably. They are still more criminal, if indulged at a time when the troubled state of the church of God denotes that the black clouds of Divine judgments are gathering over our heads, and when we should repent in dust and ashes. The neglect of prayer and meditation on the word of God is in itself sinful; but to omit them at a time when the outrageous youthful passions are revelling in our breasts; to throw away these defensive arms, and ingloriously yield ourselves captives to the devil, is much more dangerous. It is just so in all other sinful indulgences.

2. When we have unhappily wasted much time, the rest of our precious moments ought to be carefully redeemed, and usefully employed. This our blessed Lord intimates to us in the question, ‘Will ye yet sleep, and waste the remaining moments?’ When a person has but a short time for the dispatch of a weighty and important affair, a prudent man makes the most of every moment, and is as saving of time as of the gold of Ophir. We have the most momentous business now before us, namely, to prepare for eternity. How much time have we already lost? Oh, let us well improve the remaining minutes, and as Peter, after he had recovered himself from a shameful lapse, exhorts, Let us ‘no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the Will of God (1 Pet. iv. 2).

3. When one hour of suffering is past, we must hold ourselves in readiness for another conflict. The hour which had been appointed for the inward agony of Christ, was already past; now he speaks of another hour that was coming on, of which he afterwards says, ‘This is your hour, and the power of darkness.’ Our blessed Saviour has his eye on that hour, and gives us a noble pattern, to teach us that we should never be too secure, though we have got the better of a temptation. All the towering steep hills of trials are not yet ascended, and when we think we have gained the summit, another hill may present itself unexpectedly to our view. Skilful mariners, after weathering out a storm, immediately repair the ship and tackling, that they may be able to ride out another storm. Thus should we prepare ourselves for the storms of trials and temptations.

4. The hour of trial appointed us by God is no more to be changed by our not thinking of it, than the hour of death, or the day of judgment. It is a wretched remedy for a man to think, that he will banish the thoughts of all such serious things out of his

mind, that he may not be molested by them; for such a vain attempt does not in the least keep them farther from him. The disciples did not think on the hour of suffering; however, it came, though unexpected. He is far more prudent, who does not put off the preparation of his mind for trials, until the last minute.

5. To imagine that temptations, and the judgments of God, are yet at a great distance, generally renders a man careless and remiss. The wicked man is thus described by the Psalmist, 'Thy judgments are far above out of his sight.' (Ps. x. 5.) And whilst men harbour such vain delusive thoughts, they slumber and sleep, like the foolish virgins in the parable. Christ, on the contrary, earnestly calls upon us, and tells us, that 'the hour is at hand.' The apostle Peter says, that 'the end of all things is approaching.' St. Paul affirms, that 'the day of the Lord is nigh,' and St. John forewarns us, saying, 'Little children, it is the last time.' Happy is he, who by so many concurrent voices, and awakening calls, is roused to a real vigilance, and active virtue.

THE PRAYER.

To thee, O dearest Lord and Saviour, be ascribed endless praise and unspeakable thanks for thine internal sufferings, and for all thy care and faithfulness, which, amidst the sorrows that surrounded thee, was manifested for thy disciples, and likewise for all those who through their word should believe in thy name. OBlessed Jesus! may the remembrance of thy bitter agony never slip out of our minds; never may thy transcendant love, which was exemplified by sufferings, depart from our thoughts. Make us, we beseech thee, willing cheerfully to undergo any sufferings for thy sake; and may we never account our lives dear, if we can but finish our course with joy. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thine unspeakable sufferings. Amen.

ON THE
EXTERNAL SUFFERINGS
OF
CHRIST

IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

The accounts given by the four Evangelists, (Matt. xxvi. 47. 56. Mark xiv. 43, 52. Luke xxii. 47, 53. John xviii. 3, 12.) connected and harmonised.

‘AND while he yet spake, behold, he that was called Judas, one of the Twelve, having received a band of men and officers from the chief Priests and Pharisees, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, lanterns and torches, from the chief Priests, the Scribes, and the Elders of the people; and he went before them. Now he that betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, take him, and lead him away safely.

‘As soon as Judas was come, he goeth forthwith to Jesus, and said, Hail Master, Master! and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?

‘Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them. As soon as Jesus had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground.

‘Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you, that I am he: If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of those whom thou has given me, have I lost none.

‘Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. When they, who were with him, saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And behold, one of them who were with Jesus, namely, Simon Peter, having a sword, stretched out his hand, and drew it, and smote a servant of the High Priest, and cut off his right ear: the servant’s name was Malchus.

‘But Jesus answered, and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. The cup which my Father hath given me shall not I drink it? Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of Angels? but how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that sayeth thus it must be.

‘Then the band, and the captain, and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him. And Jesus said unto the chief Priests and Captains of the temple, and the elders who were come to him, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves to take me? I was daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye took me not: But this is your hour, and the power of darkness; and all this was done, that the Scriptures of the Prophets might be fulfilled.

‘Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body, and the young men laid hold on him; and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.’

THE PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, thou who not only dost plead our cause before the throne of Divine Justice, and for our sins, wert by thy Father afflicted, chastised, and tormented; but also didst suffer thyself to be delivered into the merciless hands of cruel men, to be dragged and bound like a felon, to be buffeted, mocked, and spurned. Enlighten our eyes, that in thy external sufferings also we may so contemplate the wonders of thy love, thy patience and tenderness, that we may acknowledge thee the immaculate Lamb of God, that bearest our iniquities, lay hold of thy merit by faith, and be disposed cheerfully to tread in thy blessed steps in all outward sufferings. Amen.



CONSIDERATION I.

THE COMING OF THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST TO APPREHEND HIM.

‘AND while he yet spake, behold he that was called Judas, one of the Twelve, having received a band of men and officers from the chief Priests and Pharisees, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, lanterns and torches, from the chief Priests and the Scribes, and the Elders of the people; and he went before them. Now he that betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, take him, and lead him away safely.’ (Matth. xxvi. 47, 48. Mark xiv. 43, 44. Luke xxii. 47. John xviii. 3.)

These words describe the coming of Christ’s enemies to apprehend him; in which we have an account given,

First, Of their leader, or guide.

Secondly, Of the leader’s attendants.

Thirdly, The equipage and instruments the multitude made use of for executing their purpose.

I. As to the leader of Christ's enemies, it is said, 'While he yet spake, behold, he that was called Judas, one of the Twelve, came.' The coming of the traitor is thus connected with the preceding words, in which Christ had warned his disciples against sleep, and, among other motives to vigilance, had made use of this, 'Lo ! he who betrayeth me is at hand.' Matt. xxvi. 45, 46. As our blessed Lord had foretold, so it fell out. No sooner were the words come from the sacred lips of this great Prophet, than the enemies came on at a distance. How must the drowsy disciples have started out of their sleep, when after so many kind warnings, they were so suddenly surprised. But the ring-leader of them is something more particularly described, and

1. By the high-office, which he then bore : He was 'one of the Twelve ;' and consequently no common discipie, but an apostle of Jesus Christ ; who had conversed with this his innocent Lord and Master above three years ; had heard his gracious salutary words ; had seen his surprising miracles ; and had even preached the gospel to others. This man had gradually suffered selfishness and avarice to take such an entire possession of him, that he went over to our blessed Lord's enemies, and of an apostle became a base perfidious betrayer of the Son of Man. To denote this dreadful fall St. Matthew and St. Luke introduce the narrative of this circumstance with a note of admiration, frequently used by the holy penmen, Lo ! Behold ! Thus was fulfilled the prophecy in the Psalms, ' Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lift up his head against me.' (Psalm. xli. 9.)

2. By his name, Judas ; or as St. Luke expresses it, 'he that was called Judas.' But nothing could be more opposite to the signification of his name than

his black perfidy ; for he was not a confessor, but a denier and betrayer of Jesus Christ. Thus the idols are termed gods, (1 Cor. viii. 5.) who in reality are no gods.

3. By the place which he assumed among the band of our Saviour's enemies. 'He went before them ;' and consequently had placed himself at the head of the armed multitude : But we may reasonably suppose that he was some paces before the rest, that it might not look as if he came thither in concert with the enemy. Hence he is called 'the guide (Acts i. 16.) to them that took Jesus.'

4. By the sign he makes use of. He that betrayed him [the betrayer] had given them a sign. Here the right appellation is given him ; for he was no confessor of Christ, as his name Judas imports, but a traitor, who, in consideration of the pieces of silver he had received of the chief priests, had engaged to deliver into their hands the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Now as the Roman soldiers, who were to seize the blessed Jesus, did not know him personally, proper care was taken that they should not mistake the person they were to apprehend, and instead of the master lay hold of one of the disciples : The traitor had therefore concerted with them, that he would point out the person of Christ by a certain sign ; and for this treacherous sign he made choice of a kiss, which is a sign or symbol of love and friendship, and was used among the Orientals as a form of salutation between friends when they met. But besides the sign itself, he had also given them the key of it, and told them 'whomsoever I shall kiss is he' whom you seek. Lastly, he had given them proper advice, 'Take him and lead him away safely.' As if he had said, 'All my business is to deliver him up to you ; if you suffer him to escape, the blame must lie at your door : I have done my part, and will not return any of the money, which I have so well deserved.'

Thus he thought he had managed matters with great cunning and sagacity. No one knew that he kissed Jesus with intent that they should lay hold of him ; and as to his master, he thought he would not be at a loss to make his escape and to pass through the midst of his enemies, as he had done more than once before ; (John viii. 58. Luke iv. 30.) and in the mean time, he might safely appropriate to his own use the thirty pieces of silver. Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. It is a sign of our deep corruption, that we are more apt to be moved by the apprehension of outward dangers, than by the kind admonitions of God and his Holy Spirit. How often had our blessed Saviour warned his disciples to watch ; but they were deaf to his awakening calls, and from time to time, indulged themselves with sleep. But now, the enemy being in sight, they were roused, and became thoroughly awake. It is frequently so in our times. God is for bringing many sinners from the wickedness of their ways, and gives them warning upon warning, sometimes in their consciences, and sometimes by their ministers, friends, &c. Yet they make light of all these. But when God sends some calamity or misfortune upon them, or visits them with a dangerous sickness, or a mortal disease, it is then they first come to themselves ; then they first open their slumbering eyes, bewail their mispent life, and promise amendment for the future. This depravity of our heart had likewise its influence on the sufferings of Christ, and our faithful high priest has expiated it as well as our other frailties.

2. God does not usually surprize any man at once with his sore judgments ; but when all his friendly admonitions are disregarded, and all the respites of his indulgent grace neglected ; then his severe threatenings are suddenly discharged on the sinner's guilty head. The disciples had time enough before to rouse themselves out of their lethargy ; but as they did not

make use of that opportunity, they were suddenly surprized by the enemy, and they had scarce time to recollect themselves. Hardly had our blessed Saviour given them his last exhortation, when, behold, the multitude of the enemies were coming in full march upon them. Thus it was with the human race before the deluge. They had first a respite of a hundred and twenty years; to this was added the time while Noah was building and preparing the ark; and lastly, seven days more while he was storing it with necessaries. But no amendment or reformation ensuing, after the expiration of these three terms; we are informed 'that all the fountains of the great deep were broken up.' (Genesis vii. 11.) Such is the case also in our days. It has been proclaimed that the great judgments of God are at hand; we have also with astonishment observed them executed on particular persons; yet no one lays them to heart. Voluptuousness, sensuality, and wickedness of every kind increase and abound, and the kind warnings and awakening calls of God are entirely disregarded. Now we may ourselves, without difficulty, calculate what will be the issue at last. The divine chastisements will pour down like a torrent, driven by the spirit of the Lord: And it is to be feared, that many sinners, who now imprudently delay their repentance, will, one time or other, be taken so unexpectedly as not to have time to recollect themselves; for God has already shewn his judgment on many corrupt trees, which lie as they fall. O that we may better employ our season of grace, and rightly improve the present opportunities.

3. There is no office or character so sacred, to which satan does not find an easy access. Even among the apostles, there was a thief, (John xii. 6.) a traitor, (Matt. x. 4.) nay, a devil. (John vi. 70.) What office can be more sacred than that of a bishop or minister? hence it is called 'a good work;'

(1 Tim. iii. 1.) nevertheless antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, has insinuated himself into the sacred office, and thus hath 'seated himself in the temple of God.' (2 Thess. ii. 4.) Therefore, let no one pride himself, and be lulled in security, on account of the sacredness of his office, nor flatter himself that the seducer of mankind dares not approach him. If he has not spared an apostle of Christ, it can hardly be supposed that he will fear to attempt any other Christian.

4. The vices and crimes of men ought not to be imputed to the office they bear, or their situation in life. Judas was one of the twelve. Now on such a fall of a person, his sacred character, we may suppose that the general cry was, "See, what sort of men these apostles of Jesus of Nazareth are! These are the fruits of their pretended sanctity of life and purity of manners." But who will say that in this point they judged righteous judgment? With regard to the vices of persons in the ministerial office, two errors may be committed.

First, By excusing, vindicating, and concealing their faults, though they are notorious to all the world, and repuring that such public crimes should be concealed and overlooked, in order to save the credit of the ministerial office. But how can the credit of the ministerial office consist in being made a cloak for wickedness and vice? Is it not much more to the honour of their sacred order, that they will not countenance any notorious crimes or scandalous members, but openly shew their entire dislike of their wicked ways?

Secondly, We may be guilty of another error, by aggravating the faults, and blackening the characters of such persons; and by that means casting contempt on the sacred office itself, when they who are invested with it shew themselves unworthy of their holy function. Both these extremes are very culpable. How-

ever, as the ill-natured world is much more inclined to the latter, St. Paul's advice is the more carefully to be observed; 'Giving no offence in any thing, 'that the ministry be not blamed.' (2 Cor. vi. 3.)

5. Most men, amidst all their sinful ways, affect an appearance of virtue and religion. Judas had contrived the most unjustifiable schemes; yet is he for varnishing over his perfidy with a shower of love and friendship, and, for the sign of his execrable treachery, kisses his master, whom he had betrayed. Few persons are so abandoned, as to throw off the appearance of virtue and piety; most men do not care to appear in the eye of the world so bad as they actually are, and affect to palliate their vices with specious names. Avarice, for instance, is called frugality; gluttony, drunkenness, and wantonness, are looked upon as the lawful indulgence of our appetites. Presumption, bears the title of decent ambition; lying goes by the name of an ingenious evasion; fornication and uncleanness is the more openly practised under the softening appellation of love and innocent freedoms.

II. As to the companions and attendants of the guide or leaders of Christ's enemies, they may be divided into three classes.

1. The band or multitude. By these are understood the Roman soldiers that were in garrison in Antonius's castle, near the temple; who particularly on the great festivals, when there was a vast concourse of people at Jerusalem, were to have a watchful eye on the temple, lest any insurrection or tumult should happen in that quarter. Of this Roman garrison, some officers were sent with a party of soldiers for apprehending Jesus. (Luke xxii. 52.)

2. The officers of the High Priest and Pharisees, *i. e.* of the Sanhedrim, which consisted of the chief priests and Pharisees. These had two classes of officers, *viz.* the ordinary officers of justice, whose bu-

siness was to apprehend and bring criminals before them; (John vii. 32, 45, 46. Acts v. 21, 22, 26.) and their own domestics and attendants. Some of both were present, and thus helped to increase the number.

3. Some particular persons deputed by the high priests, scribes, and elders of the people; to whom Christ particularly addressed himself in the garden. (Luke xxii. 52.) These also were part of the multitude, not only to give the proceeding a greater authority by their presence, but also to prevent Judas from embezzling the thirty pieces of silver, and imposing on the chief priests and scribes. These three classes altogether constituted a great croud, a mixed multitude, consisting of young and old, ignorant and learned; headed by Judas, as their guide. Hence we may make the following observations.

1. When Christ and his interest are to be opposed, it is astonishing to see how all sorts of men combine against him. There was in this multitude a very odd medley of Jews and Pagans, who were united as one man; for the temple-guard consisted of Roman soldiers, and was at other times obnoxious to the Jews. But here not only the servants of the chief priests and Pharisees associate with them; but likewise the Pharisees themselves, those sanctified zealots, who looked on the Pagans as so many dogs, bear them company. On these occasions when Christ and his interest is to be opposed, the spirit of persecution declares itself indiscriminately in all ranks and degrees. Then they who, at other times, lived in the most bitter enmity, agree in one impious cry. Then Pilate and Herod are made friends.

2. The suppression of the remonstrances of conscience is generally followed by a profane and scandalous behaviour. The high priests and Pharisees had hitherto been restrained from apprehending the blessed Jesus by a secret fear. They were, on the one

hand, convinced of the divine power exhibited in his miracles, as Nicodemus, in the name of them all, acknowledges; (John iii. 2.) and on the other hand, they saw the love which the people in general had for our blessed Lord, and therefore apprehended that any violence offered to him might be attended with ill consequences. Even but few hours before, they themselves in a public assembly had determined not to apprehend him on the feast. (Matt. xxvi. 4.) But a fair opportunity being offered to them by Judas, of getting Jesus into their hands, their former fears no longer subsisted, and the prudent suggestions of their consciences were totally suppressed; and thereupon they became so hardened, and so lost to all sense of shame, that they even degraded themselves by being present in this scandalous march. The knowledge of what is right and wrong is, as it were, the check by which God directs mankind. When a man throws off this check, and will no longer listen to the intimations of his conscience, he naturally breaks out into a wild and disorderly course of life, and becomes like an untamed horse which has thrown its rider; impetuously tramples over every thing in its way; casts off all sense of ingenuous shame and decency; and the marks of profligacy are to be seen in the air of his countenance, his apparel, and his whole deportment. This ought to excite in us an inward abhorrence of sin; for however bashful and timorous it may shew itself in the beginning, when it stands, as it were, at the door, and intreats to be admitted; yet when once it has got possession of the human heart, nothing is more audacious and tyrannical.

3. It is very common, but, at the same time the highest absurdity, to be influenced to commit sin from the character and reputation of others. When frail man has any little pretence for lulling asleep his troubled conscience, he too eagerly embraces it. The multitude, we may be sure, concluded, that, as one of

his own disciples and constant hearers had a hand in this affair, in all likelihood Jesus of Nazareth must have been a pestilent fellow. Others said among themselves "The High Priests and Pharisees are present here by their officers, and some of the elders in person; and these are men of learning and conscience." On this supposition the others made no scruple to be employed in the same execrable service. These prejudices likewise must have contributed to increase our Saviour's sufferings. But, alas! how frequently does Christ still suffer in this manner in his members, when great, learned, and noble persons oppose religion, and persecute God's faithful servants? But let them consider what turn matters will take at the day of judgment. They that have sinned with the mighty, shall be mightily tormented.

III. The equipage and instruments which the multitude made use of for executing their purpose are of two kinds.

1. Some were for caution, as torches, and lamps or lanterns. The Passover of the Jews used to fall out at the full moon, so that notwithstanding it was night, it could not be very dark; yet they brought with them torches and lanterns in order to find out our blessed Lord, in case he had concealed himself among the trees and shrubs in the garden, or stolen away and hid himself in the neighbouring rocks. This shews their great zeal to apprehend Jesus at all events; but, like all wicked men, they feared where there was no ground to fear. (Psalm liii. 5.)

2. They had likewise defensive weapons, as swords and staves. The former were, for the most part, in the hands of the Roman soldiers; the latter belonged to the officers, high Priests and Pharisees. This shews that they were under some apprehensions, that Christ and his disciples would repel force by force; and therefore by these offensive weapons they had put

themselves in such a condition, that if it were necessary to come to blows, they might be able to carry off their prisoner by force.

All these implements and weapons serve only to augment our blessed Saviour's sufferings. By their torches and lanterns, they meant to shew themselves persons that were not afraid of the light; but on the contrary, they would represent Christ as a miscreant lurking in the dark, and consequently, that the worst thing that could befall him would be to come upon him unawares, amidst the blaze of torches. By their swords and staves they intended to denote, that Christ and his disciples were to be looked upon as a company of robbers and murderers, who always stand on their defence when the magistrates are for bringing them to justice. Hence we may learn,

1. That craft and violence are the usual arms, which satan and his instruments make use of against Christ and his disciples. Here they were both employed; torches by way of precaution, that Christ, as they idly apprehended, might not escape their hands, and staves and swords for offensive weapons. Thus Satan shews himself sometimes as a serpent, and sometimes as a lion. Happy is he! who is armed against him on the right, and on the left, with the whole armour of God that he may not be deceived by his craft and subilty, nor terrified by his raging fierceness.

2. The men of this world usually judge of Christ and his members according to the dispositions they find in themselves. As these were the children of darkness, and accordingly were for executing their black purpose under covert of the night, they thought that Christ also loved darkness, and would be surprised by the glare of their torches; and as they were of such an impetuous temper, that they were ready to draw their swords on every occasion, so they likewise supposed that Christ would do no less. This

is the ground of innumerable false judgments, which the children of the world pass on the good and virtuous.

3. Christ still in his members suffers the reproach of avoiding the light, from those who are themselves children of the night and of darkness. The multitude by their lanterns intimated that Christ loved darkness; and in this his persecuted members must be made conformable to their suffering Head, in being accused of shunning the light, and carrying on their practices clandestinely. On the other hand, the children of this world would fain be thought to have a clear conscience, and to fear nothing, though they ever walk in darkness. These supposed children of the day, who pretend to such clearness of conscience, will be obliged one day to 'conceal themselves in the dens and caves of the rocks, and to say to the mountains fall on us, and hide us, from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.' (Rev. vi. 16.)

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour! whatever sins we have committed in the darkness of the night thou hast also expiated in the night; and as we have offended the justice of God not only with the powers and faculties of our souls, but also with the members of our bodies, so thou hast been pleased to make satisfaction for them, not only by the anguish of thy spotless soul, but hast suffered thyself to be ill treated in thy sacred body by the hands of wicked men. To thee, O blessed Jesus, be ascribed endless praise and unfeigned thanks. Grant, for the sake of thy love, that by these thy sufferings, we may attain the eternal salvation of our souls. Amen.

CONSIDERATION II.

JUDAS'S TREACHEROUS BEHAVIOUR.

'AS soon as Judas was come, he goeth forthwith to Jesus, and said, hail Master! and kissed him.— And Jesus said unto him, friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' (Matt. xxvi. 49, 50. Mark xiv. 45. Luke xxii. 47, 48.)

These words give an account,

First, Of Judas's hypocritical salutation and kiss.

Secondly, Of Christ's mild answer to the traitor.

I. In Judas's hypocritical salutation, we may observe,

1. The betrayer's coming; 'As soon as Judas came, he forthwith goeth to Jesus.'

It has been observed in the preceding consideration, that, in all appearance, Judas went at some distance before the armed multitude, in order to look about for his master, that he might deliver him up. Accordingly, when he was come to the place where our Saviour was, we are told by St. Mark that 'As soon as he was come, he goeth straight-way to him.' One would be apt to imagine that Judas here acted with an entire freedom, according to the mere impulse of his own mind; but on comparing the passage before us with that in St. John, (John xiii. 27.) 'And after the sop, satan entered into him,' we shall see that under all this appearance of entire liberty, Judas was no longer his own master, but had given up his understanding, his will, and all his faculties to satan, who now dragged him as a wild beast caught in his toils.

2. The betrayer's speech. As soon as he comes up to the Lord Jesus, he says, 'Hail Rabbi!' Rabbi or Master was the usual title which scholars gave to their teachers, and in conformity to the custom of those times, Christ accepted of this appellation from his disciples. Thus Peter says, 'Master it is good to be here;' (Mark ix. 5.) 'Master the fig-tree is withered;' (Mark xi. 21.) 'They said, Rabbi, which is to say, being interpreted, Master.' (John i. 38.)—The Jewish doctors held this title in high esteem; and were so extremely fond of it, as, sometimes, even to excommunicate those who refused to give it them, which preposterous vanity and pride our blessed Lord reproaches them with. (Matt. xxiii. 7.) But Christ himself might with the greatest justice and propriety, allow himself to be so stiled by his disciples; he being their only master and supreme teacher, of whom Moses had before prophesied, (Deut. xviii. 15, 18.) 'They sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. (Deut. xxxiii. 3.) But by the repetition of this title, Master! Master! the hypocritical traitor Judas meant to shew the joy and love, with which his heart, as it were, overflowed, He withal accosts him with the salutation, Hail! or joy be to thee. This was an usual form of salutation, and occurs also in other places in the gospel. (Matt. xxvii. 29. xxviii. 9.) But here this friendly salutation was most wickedly abused; for Judas wishes his Master joy and happiness, at a time when his mind was bent on plunging him, by his treachery, into the greatest misery, and the most deplorable condition. Lastly here is also described

3. The traitor's outward behaviour. 'He kissed him.' It has already been advised, that among the eastern people, the kiss was a sign or symbol of friendship. It was indeed more usual for teachers to kiss their scholars, the kiss expressing their affection to them; however the writings of the Jews afford in-

stances of scholars expressing their reverence and esteem to their teachers, by this form of saluting, which accordingly Judas observes to his master, under the appearance of a particular love and esteem. But the Greek word imports that he kissed him several times, in which sense the word is used by St. Luke, (chap. vii. 38.) speaking of the woman, who, in the transports of her sincere repentance for her past sins, kissed our Saviour's feet. Thus falsehood and deceit, affects in words and gestures the garb and appearance of friendship, probity, and strong affection. Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. There is in sin a certain force and propensity to proceed in all wickedness, by which a man is carried away, as it were, by a rapid and impetuous stream. Judas having admitted treachery and perfidiousness into his heart, it was now to enter on action; and he had no longer any power over himself. Satan allowed him no time to recollect himself, 'forthwith he came to Jesus.' He was then like one who, having slipped down a steep declivity, is unable to stop his course, but slides on to the very bottom of it. So that the best advice we can follow, is, to watch the first beginnings of sinful motions, and be cautious that we do not take delight and acquiesce in them; otherwise we shall not be able to resist them, as too many have experienced to their infinite sorrow.—When a man is prevailed upon to be present in bad company, he at the same time resolves to be strictly on his guard, and avoid all intemperance and excess: He concludes, there can be no great harm in a little indulgence; but before he is aware, satan snatches the reins out of his hand, and drives him into sin and infamy.

2. The children of this world often, by their assiduity in their pursuits, shame the children of God; the latter seldom shewing so much zeal for good, as the former for evil. It must certainly make us blush,

to see how readily and undauntedly Judas comes up to the blessed Jesus, to abuse him with his insidious salutation and kiss. No one is thus zealous and ardent to run into the open arms of our blessed Saviour. He graciously invited sinners, saying, 'Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden!' (Matt. xi. 28.) but how few came to this good shepherd on this friendly invitation? How often is he still to repeat the lamentation he made over ungrateful Jerusalem, 'How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not?' (Matt. xxiii. 37.) Certainly, it must reflect great disgrace on us, that Judas should shew more ardour and readiness to betray our blessed Lord, and deliver him up to his enemies, than we to receive this divine guest. When he says, 'My Son, give me thy heart,' how slow are we in offering it up to him? how often, and how long, is he obliged to intreat for it? Therefore, this promptitude of Judas should shame us, and excite our minds to an immediate and willing obedience. What can make us pause and hesitate? Why do we suffer ourselves to be fettered by the spirit of sluggishness? Are we afraid of being happy too soon? If we saw the avenger of blood at our heels, we should not stand gazing about, but stretch every fibre to reach the city of Refuge, and save our souls alive.

3. To address Christ with Lord, Lord, and yet not do the will of his Heavenly Father, (Matt. vii. 21.) is a deceit exactly resembling the perfidy of Judas. He cried, Rabbi! Rabbi! and yet had evil designs in his heart against his master: Thus thousands of outward professors say, Lord, Lord, yet do not obey his precepts; which, in reality, is mocking Christ. None should more carefully guard against such hypocrisy, than students in divinity. For in learning the will of God from the Holy Scriptures and the salutary words of our blessed Saviour, they acknowledge Christ for their Rabbi, their Lord and Master, Now if they,

at the same time, live according to their depraved lusts and appetites, as slaves of sin and satan do, what is this but treading in the footsteps of Judas, who had the title of Rabbi, Rabbi, fluent on his tongue ; yet was at the same time a treacherous enemy, and the betrayer of Christ ? All such perfidiousness the Son of God was pleased to expiate, and consequently has obtained the remission of such dreadful sins, if only repented of and relinquished in time.

4. The falshood and deceit committed by the first Adam at his fall, and daily repeated by his posterity, the second Adam was most painfully to expiate. These false compliments and pretended marks of respect, paid to Christ in the garden, could not but give him a great deal of pain ; his eyes being so pure, that they cannot behold iniquity, Now the more sincere and virtuous a person is, the more uneasiness does it give him to find others behaving deceitfully ; especially those to whom he has shewn much tenderness, and done many kind offices. Hence we may easily conceive, how near such dissimulation and treachery must go to our blessed Saviour's heart. But by this perfidious treatment, was he to expiate the deceit and craft practised by man in the garden of Paradise, when he broke his allegiance to his indulgent Creator. As we all sinned in the fall, so is the falsity of the human heart in every one of us included in this treacherous kiss. Christ has, therefore by this expiated, on our repentance, all kinds of dissimulation, hypocrisy, false compliments, and empty ceremonies, which are too often practised by men, with a design of imposing on God, or their neighbour. These practices, in the sight of God, are no inconsiderable sins ; though to circumvent and deceive others, by an outside show of love and friendship, when the heart means quite otherwise, is by the world accounted prudence and cunning. (Psalm lv. 21.) If we find ourselves infected with this contagion, let us bring our deceitful

hearts to our blessed Lord, who is true and faithful, and in whose mouth was no deceit or guile ; and pray to him that he would heal them, and inspire us with an abhorrence of all kind of treachery, falshood, and dissimulation.

5. As Christ offered his lips to such a deceitful kiss, no sincere Christian should entertain the least apprehension, that he will turn away from his addresses. We do not here read that the gentle, the mild, the unresenting Jesus turned aside his face when Judas approached to kiss him ; but as he afterwards offered his sacred back to the smiters, and his face to shame and spitting ; so here he offers his lips to the false kiss. Has our blessed Lord endured such a kiss, which savoured of dissimulation, and the blackest perfidy ? How shall he then repulse a pious soul that would kiss the Son in faith, and in the spirit draw near to those lips, on which grace is abundantly poured ? (Psalm xlv. 3.)

II. We next come to Christ's mild answer to the traitor ; which contains in it a twofold speech, and two questions.

In the twofold speech or address to Judas, he first calls his betrayer by the endearing title of Friend ; a name by which, amongst the ancients, teachers used to address their scholars. By this, our blessed Saviour gently reminds his betrayer of the former friendship and confidence, in which they had reciprocally lived, (Psalm xli. 9.) and likewise of the duty and affection incumbent on him as a true and faithful friend. But immediately after this, he accosts him by his own proper name, 'Judas !' This was in order to impress on his mind the signification of that name, according to which he was to own his master, as a confessor, and not to deny and betray him.

The two questions are,

1. 'Wherefore art thou come ?' Christ by this question reminded Judas of the cause of his coming.

As if he had said, "You would not, indeed, have it known, for what end you are come here; you are for covering your falshood with the show of respect and friendship; but I know your horrid design, and the treachery of your heart is not concealed from me." Thus our blessed Lord, even under this deep abasement and humiliation, shews that he is a searcher of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

2. 'Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' Here he gives the action its proper name, and plucks the mask from the dissembling traitor's face. "Thou betrayest the Son of Man whom thou thyself hast preached to the world; of whom thou hast received so many favours; and, what is still worse, with a kiss, the usual sign of peace and friendship." By this gentle and endearing manner of accosting him, Christ is still for softening the stony heart of his betrayer, and filling it with better thoughts: But all was in vain! He was now quite hardened. He had already heard many pathetical discourses from his master; but had paid no manner of regard to them; so that satan now had obtained an absolute power over his obdurate heart. Hence let us learn,

1. That the affectionate mildness and indulgent tenderness of the Lord Jesus towards the greatest of sinners, was to atone for the hardness of our savage hearts. Christ still calls him his friend, who acted the part of an enemy towards him. Why does he not say, 'Thou hypocrite: thou child of the devil, full of all subtilty and mischief!' Why does he not repeat the dreadful catastrophe that was to befall him who should betray the Son of Man? Alas! had the best and mildest among us been in our blessed Saviour's place, scarcely would he have shewn such unparalleled gentleness. But let not our eye be evil, because the Lord is so good; for we partake of his goodness. This is of singular advantage to a repenting sinner, when satan would inspire him with

the most terrifying ideas of Christ's justice and inflexibility ; then may an humble and contrite heart very justly make this inference : Did my Saviour talk with so much lenity and tenderness to a false friend ? he will by no means sternly reject me who am not conscious of any perfidiousness ? Alas ! if the human heart be not moved by this amazing condescension of Christ, it has certainly great cause to lament its invincible obduracy. This gentleness of our blessed Lord ought also to amend and soften our impetuosity of temper, and proneness to anger, and make us learn to be mild and gentle towards the wicked ; and this duty is particularly incumbent on a minister of Christ. (2 Tim. ii. 24.)

2. The gentleness of Christ in this instance, should also teach us to observe a right method in reproving sinners. Here likewise the Lamb of God atones for our imprudence, in reproving the wickedness of others, in extenuating our own faults, and vehemently inveighing against those of our neighbour ; by which means we often more imbitter the heart of him, whom we ought to have reprov'd with brotherly love and mildness.

THE PRAYER.

O THOU most mild and forgiving Jesus ! who didst shew the greatest love and tenderness to thy greatest enemy ; let me also when I have offended thee, partake of this thy kindness and gentleness. Give me grace also to love mine enemies, and to bear the greatest injuries with all patience and gentleness, after thy great example. Amen.

CONSIDERATION III.

CHRIST'S FIRST DISCOURSE WITH THE MULTITUDE OF HIS ENEMIES.

‘JESUS therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them. As soon as Jesus had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.’ (John xviii. 4, 5, 6.)

These words exhibit to us the first discourse of Christ with the band of his enemies; and this is related by St. John only, who is particularly attentive to, and points out every ray of Christ's divinity.—Here,

First, Are to be observed, the persons who discoursed together.

Secondly, The words of their discourse.

Thirdly, The wonderful effect of those words.

I. They who are discoursing together are,

1. On one side, the Lord Jesus, who is described, both according to his omniscience, and his readiness to suffer.

Of his omniscience, it is said, ‘Jesus knowing all things that should come upon him.’ Our blessed Lord could unquestionably see the blaze of the torches at a distance, and hear the confused noise which such a multitude must have caused in coming along. But had they come in the dark, and with the greatest silence, he would, by the effulgent light of his omniscience, have seen into their hidden devices. He not only knew, that the enemy was at hand; but likewise ‘knew all things that should come upon him,’

all the inhuman insults, affronts, the bonds, and savage barbarity, which attended this armed multitude.

The readiness of our blessed Lord to suffer, is expressed in these words, 'He went forth, *i. e.* out of the garden, that he might not be the cause of any detriment to the owner of it; which must have been the consequence of such a multitude forcing their way in, and treading every thing under foot. Accordingly, he goes towards his enemies, indicating that it was not their stratagem and malice that brought him to his death, but his own goodness and resignation. By his avoiding it hitherto, his design was to teach us, that we are not wilfully to run into danger, and tempt God. But now his hour being come, he by his voluntary presenting himself, teaches us, that under the prevalence of danger, we are to submit our wills to the will of God.

2. On the other side was the multitude of soldiers and officers; among whom were likewise some of the priests, scribes, and elders of the people who, under the guidance of the traitor Judas, were come in quest of him with swords, staves, and torches.— These are the parties in the conversation. Hence the following observations offer themselves.

1. The son of God was pleased to suffer knowingly and voluntarily, in order to atone for our known voluntary sins. Christ knew all that was to befall him, yet he determined to undergo the whole. When men foresee any misfortune or calamity, they make use of such knowledge for avoiding it. But Christ makes use of his Omiscience, in order the more readily to meet his sufferings; being well assured, that nothing could befall him, but what was determined in the secret counsels of God concerning the Messiah. By this willing submission, he was to atone for our presumptuous fall. Our first parents were not ignorant, that in the forbidden tree they should eat death. They had before been told, 'On the day thou eatest thereof

thou shalt surely die.' Notwithstanding this, they followed their own imagination, and thus sinned against knowledge. Even now, though we know what will be the consequence of sin; though the scripture clearly and expressly says, 'he that believeth not shall be condemned; if ye live according to the flesh, ye shall die; the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, hatred, murder, &c. of which I tell you before, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God;' yet we venture on these heinous sins, and look upon all the threatening of the word of God as mere empty sounds. To expiate and atone for such our presumptuous sins, the Son of God was to suffer voluntarily; O that this consideration may powerfully deter us from all deliberate and voluntary sins!

2. Christ's willingness to undergo his sufferings is to be looked upon as a considerable part of his merit. The victims in the sacrifices of the Old Testament were dragged to the altar with cords; but Christ presented himself there voluntarily, and went like a patient lamb to meet those miscreants who sought him. This willingness to surrender himself is the more to be admired, as it was accompanied with omniscience. Many a christian has willingly gone towards a danger which he did not foresee, or could not avoid; but possibly had he known before hand, what calamity or torture was waiting for him, it would have put him to a stand. But in this appears the infinite superiority of Christ: He did not go to his sufferings, as it were blindfold, but enlightened by the All-seeing eye of omniscience itself. What a meritorious power lies in this circumstance, we learn from St. Paul, (Heb. x. 9, 10.) where he certifies, that by the willingness of Christ to accomplish the good will of God in our redemption, we are reconciled and sanctified; this being the sweet smelling savour which, in the sacrifice of Christ, was so acceptable to his Heavenly Father.

(Eph. v. 2.) By this means he has atoned for all the murmuring and reluctance, with which our impatient flesh goes to the sufferings which God has appointed for us; and at the same time, he has given us a shining example for our imitation.

3. It is a christian's duty, wilfully to cause no detriment or uneasiness to any one. Christ immediately went out of the garden, that the owner of it might not sustain any damage: So likewise should his followers do. Every one, indeed, should be willing, when it is necessary, to share in the sufferings of their fellow christians, which St. Paul commends in his epistle to the Hebrews. (Chap. x. 32, 33.) But charity requires us to use the utmost caution against unnecessarily causing others to participate in our sufferings. That heart must be a stranger to love and charity, which can think that others ought to suffer with it, when there is no necessity to involve them in the same calamity. Peter was reprov'd by our blessed Lord when he seemed to envy John, because he apprehended he was not to suffer like the rest of the apostles. (John xxi. 21, 22.) True love, or charity, rejoices at another's welfare; (1 Cor. xiii. 6.) and it is no comfort to a good christian to have many companions in his sufferings. This love was eminently conspicuous in the primitive christians under their persecutions; insomuch that the severest tortures could not work on them to betray their brethren and companions in the faith of Christ.

II. In the words which were spoken by both parties in this conversation are to be considered,

First, The question put by our Lord to the multitude, viz. 'Whom seek ye?' These words indicate Christ's uncommon resolution and intrepidity. This is the more to be wondered at, as satan had just before discharged all his fiery darts at our blessed Lord; and he had been entirely surrounded by fears, terrors, sorrow, and extreme anguish of soul. But now this

inward agony is subsided, his placid countenance shews him all serenity, fortitude, and resignation. Accordingly his enemies no sooner appear than he intrepidly asks them, 'Whom seek ye?' Not that he was ignorant whom they sought: St. John, but a little before, having observed that 'Jesus knew all that was to come upon him;' but that he might have an opportunity of making himself known to the multitude. From these words it may reasonably be concluded that not one of the crowd knew him, and that they all had been struck with blindness at the garden door, as the Sodomites were at Lot's door, (Gen. xix. 11.) and the Syrians when they came to take Elisha. (2 Kings vi. 18.) And though they did not want torches and lanterns, they were now feeling their way, and did not know where they were.

Secondly, The enemies answer. They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth,' namely, it is he whom we seek. This name is frequently given to our blessed Saviour by way of contempt; as he had been educated by obscure parents at Nazareth, a mean town in Galilee, and had past most of his life there.—The despicable opinion which the Jews had of this little place, appears from the question put by upright Nathaniel, 'Can there any good thing come from Nazareth.' (John i. 46.) Nay, Christ himself was so little respected in this place, that he owns that 'A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country.' (Mark vi. 1, 2, 3, 4.) Therefore these words, 'Jesus of Nazareth,' which were also superscribed on the cross, were undoubtedly spoken by way of contempt, and shewed the pride and malice of the multitude; as the modern Jews in their writings contemptuously stile our blessed Saviour *The Nazarene*. We come,

Thirdly, To Christ's confession, 'I am he.' "I am that Jesus of Nazareth, whom you seek." This is a fresh proof of the willing readiness with which

our blessed Saviour went to his sufferings. For here he makes himself known, without any fear of the consequences; and though his enemies were struck with blindness, yet he chooses rather to open their eyes, than to take the advantage of their blindness to make his escape, as Elisha did when he was surrounded by his enemies in Dodan. (2 Kings .xi. 18, 19, 20.)

When the first Adam became obnoxious to the Divine Justice, he fled, and hid himself; and God called 'Adam, where art thou?' But the second Adam, when he was delivered into the hands of his enemy, called out, 'Here am I.' Hence we learn the following truths.

1. Christ was the principal mark at which all the fiery darts of satan, and all his infernal engines, were levelled. These men being asked, 'Whom seek ye?' They made no difficulty of answering 'Jesus of Nazareth.' He is the king on mount Sion, against whom the 'Jews take counsel, and the Heathen rage.' (Psalm. ii. 1.) He is the mark aimed at in all the persecutions which the world raises against goodness. For however they may frequently pretend quite different motives, and charge the servants of God with all kinds of vices and raising tumults; yet these are only fig-leaf coverings of their own malice and rancour against Christ. Would they frankly own who it is that they seek in all their crafty and bloody minded attempts, it would plainly appear that it is Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore it should be no matter of wonder to us, that when we enlist under the banner, and among the followers, of Jesus Christ, we become members of a sect which is every where spoken against. (Acts xxviii. 22.) While a man conforms to the world, and follows its pomps and vanities, its debaucheries and disorderly courses, he will be courted and esteemed by all who resemble him in dissolution of manners: Nay, if he leads a life that is not openly

scandalous, and observes some outward decorum, he may avoid the hatred of the rest of the world. But whenever the refined temper of Christ displays itself in his conduct, he then becomes the mark of obloquy and ill-will. The world can bear with all kinds of excellencies, except those virtues which bear the distinguished marks of the Lord Jesus.

2. When the spirit of murder exerts the hands of the world to persecute the saints, the spirit of slander, calumny and ridicule, generally actuates their tongues. In the instance before us they are both seen united together. As the impious hands of Christ's enemies were bringing weapons to assault, and cords to bind him; so their envenomed tongues load him with the contemptuous name of a Nazarene. Satan, indeed, often shews himself as a lying spirit, when he can carry his malice no farther, and cannot murder or persecute; but seldom exerts himself as a murdering spirit without scattering about lies, calumnies, and all kinds of abusive language. Thus St. Paul, in the history of his sufferings, is called 'a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes.' (Acts xxiv. 5.) Others have been treated no better; for the world is continually branding with new names of contempt those who do not side with it, but are actuated with real goodness. But who would lay to heart such empty sounds? What detriment was it to Christ in his sufferings to be called a Nazarene? God, on the contrary gave him a name, 'to which every knee must bow.' (Phil. ii. 9, 10.) 'This favour of a new name, he has promised to all that shall overcome. (Rev. ii. 17.) He that cannot bear an approbrious name for the sake of Christ, is not worthy of him, but is still a novice in his school.

III. The Evangelist, before he relates the wonderful effects of our blessed Lord's words, adds, 'And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them.' Pro-

bably he was a little confounded, when he saw matters were like to take another turn than he had imagined. However, from these words one would almost conclude, that he had boldly placed himself at the head of the multitude, without feeling any remorse; for though he had been better instructed in goodness than the rest, his heart was grown obdurate by long opposition to the motions of grace. This is, indeed, a melancholy sign, and may justly impress a holy fear on all those who are students in theology. One who had been in the school of Christ himself, and had heard the words of eternal life from his own mouth, yet arrives at such an astonishing pitch of wickedness. He arms his shameless forehead with unmoved effrontery, whilst the multitude tremble and fall prostrate before the majesty of Christ. Thus sad experience teaches us, that when those who are daily conversant with the word of God, relax in their morals, they become superlatively wicked, and run greater lengths than other sinners. If they bring such an impious temper with them into the ministerial office, they prove a most pernicious set of men, the betrayers of Christ's cause, the persecutors of his members, and enemies to all goodness. For by neglecting so many opportunities which they have enjoyed above others, of converting to God, their heart becomes harder; but the judgments of God, at last, break in upon them like an impetuous torrent. Unhappy miscreants! Better had it been for them, that they had never been born.

But to proceed to the effect of Christ's words, which are thus related: 'As soon as Jesus had said to them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.' Such is the force of a single word of the Lord Jesus when accompanied with the effulgent beams of his omnipotence, that, like a flash of lightning, it strikes to the ground a body of armed soldiers. Christ in this instance displays,

1. His omnipotence. For without thunder or lightning, without spears or swords, by three monosyllables only, 'I am he,' he strikes to the ground such a tumultuous crowd. This display of the divine majesty and power should convince our minds of the high dignity of the suffering person, and that he is qualified to be the supreme judge of the quick and the dead. For if these words 'I am he,' spoken with a mild accent, had such an astonishing force, what a thunder clap, in the ear of the trembling sinner, will that fatal sentence be, 'Depart from me, ye cursed!' If his words had such effect when he was to be judged, what amazing power will he display when he cometh to judge the world!

Our blessed Saviour here also manifests,

2. His willingness to suffer. For from this proof of his omnipotence it is evident, that it was in his power to have easily repulsed his enemies; but he only gives them a specimen of his Almighty power, and, instead of doing them any farther hurt, permits them to stand up again: 'For the Son of Man came not to destroy mens' lives but to save them.' (Luke ix. 56.) As our blessed Lord, through the whole course of his ministry, had performed no miracle which tended to any one's detriment, but was pleased only to shew his judicial power on a herd of swine*, and a barren fig-tree, it is not to be supposed that he would now act otherwise, when he was resigning himself to suffer. Hence we may learn the following particulars:

1. That even extraordinary events have not always

* Gadara was a town belonging to the tribe of Gad, but given to the Greeks by Pompey. The neighbouring Jews carried on an illicit trade in hogs, for the subsistence of the Roman army, though strictly forbidden by Hircanus Aristobulus. This clears our blessed Lord from the injustice charged on him by modern infidels on account of this miracle. W.

power to move the obdurate hearts of men. Here an extraordinary miracle was wrought; but what good effect did it produce? Judas and his desperate band were not deterred from their wicked purposes; but rouse up more incensed because they had been laid prostrate on the ground: Nor were the other disciples strengthened in their faith, or confirmed against the offence of the cross, by this extraordinary event. How obdurate are the hearts of men, which, frequently, are not moved by the most glaring miracles!

2. One word of the Lord Jesus can inspire his servants with joy, and strike a terror into the wicked. These few words, 'It is I,' in a moment freed the hearts of the disciples from fear on other occasions; (Matt. xiv. 27. Luke xxiv. 39.) and here words of the same import fill the hearts of the enemy with dread and consternation.

3. The weakness of man is never more conspicuous than when it opposes the will of God. Of what service to this great multitude are all the vain apparatus of staves, swords, torches, &c. when they are employed against the power of Christ. Yet men are vain enough to boast of their strength. A feather makes some little resistance against a tempest; but here the disproportion is infinitely greater. For 'all the nations, before God, are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing.' (Isaiah xl. 17.) This awful consideration should move the potentates of the earth to cease from striving against God, and raging against Christ and his members, lest they be thunder-struck with these words, as Paul was, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. (Acts ix. 5.) The gracious promise which God has given to his church remains fixed and unchangeable. 'No weapon formed against thee shall prosper.' (Isaiah liv. 17.) Blessed is he who hath such an Almighty Being for his

Lord, his patron, and protector, and is numbered among his friends! 'Who is he that will harm him, if he be a follower of that which is good? (1 Peter iii. 13.) The prince of this world, how terrifying soever his appearance may be, is already judged, and cannot hurt or annoy us without the divine permission.

THE PRAYER.

Almighty Saviour, before whom all the wicked are scattered as chaff before the wind, may our hearts be so thoroughly convinced of thy transcendent power and greatness, that we may willingly lay ourselves at thy feet, and worship thee, lest thou destroy us by the blasting of the breath of thy lips. Thou here rulest among thine enemies; come and rule also in our hearts; and may that carnal mind, which is enmity against thee, be made thy footstool. Grant that thy sacred Word may not be unto us a savour of death unto death, but a savour of life unto life, for the sake of thine infinite love. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IV.

A CONTINUATION OF CHRIST'S DISCOURSE
WITH HIS ENEMIES.

'THEN asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you, that I am He; if therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of those whom thou gavest me, have I lost none.' (John xviii. 7, 8, 9.)

This is the continuance of Christ's discourse with his enemies; and shews us,

First, That Christ is sought a second time.

Secondly, That he was found.

I. The evangelist, in relating how Christ was sought a second time, mentions,

1. The question of the person sought. 'Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye?' In this narrative it is tacitly implied, that the Lord Jesus had permitted his enemies to rise up again, after the Almighty Power of his word had laid them prostrate on the ground. Having a little recovered themselves from their consternation, our blessed Lord observed by the light of their torches, that they were feeling about, as in the dark, without perceiving him; he therefore again, with an audible voice, repeats the former question, 'Whom seek ye?' That if it were possible, they might be diverted from their evil purposes, and by considering with what a sacred and powerful person they had to do, be put on better thoughts. Then follows,

2. The answer of those who were seeking him. 'They said, Jesus of Nazareth.' Thus, just after feeling the wonderful power of Christ, they persisted in their former answer, and execrable design. They were resolved to apprehend Jesus of Nazareth at any rate. Hence arise the following observations.

1. On escaping any imminent danger, we ought to ask our consciences again, What future course of life we intend to lead? This we may learn from our Lord's behaviour on this occasion. That very word, which had laid his enemies on the ground, might also have precipitated them into hell. Did the earth once open, and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their adherents, for raising a sedition against Moses, who was only a servant of God? Much more might it now have opened wide its tremendous mouth, and swallowed these rebels, who were leagued together in such a dreadful tumult against the Son of God himself, but were saved from this danger by Christ's long-suffering and patience. Hence the blessed Jesus again puts the former question to the multi-

tude, to let them consider whether they still persisted in their horrid intention. How often are we saved from a manifest danger of our lives, or recovered from some dangerous disease, by the indulgent care of Divine Providence. Such a happy opportunity every one of us should lay hold of, and put these questions to himself: "What is thy present pursuit? How wilt thou now dispose of thyself? If God snatched thee suddenly away in the midst of thy sins, thou wouldst have been now in the dark and dismal prison of a wretched eternity, But as thou art still in the land of the living, how wilt thou employ the precious remainder of thy time? What thanks wilt thou render to thy gracious creator and preserver, for his forbearance and long-suffering." Such an enquiry would probably have an happy influence on our lives.

2. It is a dangerous case to persist in wicked designs, notwithstanding repeated admonitions, to deter us from putting them in execution. The sin of these men, without doubt, was greatly aggravated, because they persisted in an impious design, after so evident and so sensible a conviction of the divine majesty of Christ. But, alas! this tragedy is daily acted over again. How often does God call back many of us, when we have formed a design of committing some great sin? How often does he remonstrate to the conscience, and ask, "Unhappy man! What art thou about? What advantage dost thou seek in sinning? Thou wilt by no means attain thine evil purpose." Yet with what eagerness and ardour is that sin committed? How do we, time after time, renew our purposes of accomplishing our impious desires, though we have been once and again prevented, and sometimes have suffered by making the attempt. This the Son of God here expiates, by permitting himself to be a second time assaulted by his enemies, though they had already felt the effects of

his power. For in the sufferings of Christ, we are always to observe, that in them is most plainly manifested the divine justice of retaliation. As we sin, in the same manner is our surety punished to expiate our sins. Every circumstance of our sins superinduced a new circumstance in his sufferings. Who will therefore go on to commit any sin, the expiation of which cost the Son of God so much pain and ignominy.

II. Christ being sought a second time, is found again.

First, He here voluntarily surrenders himself up to sufferings. 'I have told you that I am He.' Here he repeats his former confession, and offers himself to the sufferings appointed for him. Hence we learn,

1. That Christ, by his reiterated confession of the truth, was to expiate our false evasions and lies of necessity, as they are called. How should we have behaved, had we been surrounded by an armed multitude sent to apprehend us, but whose eyes God had blinded, that they should not see us? Had any one of us been once and again asked, Whether he was the person they sought? would he not have had recourse to falshood; and to avoid the danger, have said, I am not, or given some equivocal answer? But Christ immediately declares the truth, and shews himself that immaculate Lamb, in whose mouth was no deceit. This behaviour of the blessed Jesus has also a reconciliatory power. This frank confession of the truth in such a terrifying exigency, when bonds and stripes, mockings and buffetings awaited him, was to expiate and atone for the many untruths and evasions that proceed from our mouths.

2. Christ most willingly makes himself known to those who seek him from their hearts. Does our blessed Saviour permit himself to be found by those who seek him with torches and swords to put him to death? How much more readily will he say to those,

who implore his blessings, and seek him with tears, 'Here I am.' Does he discover himself to those who hate him, without a cause? With what satisfaction and complacency will he fulfil that gracious promise to a faithful soul, 'To him who loveth me will I manifest myself.' Thus our blessed Lord voluntarily surrendered himself to his sufferings. But it is farther related,

Secondly, How he procures a dismissal for his disciples. This is to be considered, first, as an instance of his omnipotence. 'If ye seek me, let these go their way.' Certainly these words greatly display the majesty of Christ. This is no request, for that would have been little attended to by the raging multitude, but a command. They are the words of one who could give law to his enemies. Before he gives up his hands to the cords, he, with his powerful word, binds his enemies hands, so that they shall not lay hold on his disciples, whom they certainly would not have spared, had they been permitted to follow the impulse of their malice; especially after Peter had smote with the sword, and consequently had more irritated the high Priest, whose servant had been wounded. This was the powerful passport, which he procured for his disciples; and was no less a miracle than that he wrought at the creation, when he spoke to the mighty waters of the seas. 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; here shall thy proud waves be staid:' For in these words, he controuls and sets bounds to the turbulent rage of his enemies.

But this safe-conduct is also to be looked upon as an accomplishment of his preceding prayer; which the Evangelist intimates, by adding, 'That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of those whom thou hast given me, have I lost none.' These words of St. John allude to the mediatorial prayer of Christ, (John xvii: 12.) in which, a few hours before, among

other things, he had prayed for the preservation of his poor disciples. Christ in that pathetic prayer, unquestionably had his eye on something much higher than the temporal preservation of his disciples; but that was included in it, and obtained in prayer, for the sake of the spiritual. For had the disciples then unhappily fallen into the enemy's hand, they would not only have perished in a natural way, but perhaps spiritually and eternally; as in some measure may be inferred from the example of Peter, who, in his distress, basely denied his master. Hence we learn,

1. That Christ, by his surrender of himself to suffer his whole passion, procured our acquittal and discharge at the divine tribunal. This is included in those words of love and tenderness; 'If ye seek me, let these go their way.' For though they immediately relate to his disciples, yet in these words are also comprehended all his faithful confessors, who, through his divine appointment, were to believe on him. (John xvii. 20.) That these may go free, he gives himself up in their stead. This was the end of his sufferings, of which also the release of the murderer Barrabas, instead of the blessed Jesus, was a type. Hence the prophet Isaiah says, 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.' He exposes himself as a mark for the arrows of God's wrath to be discharged at, that we may be safe behind the impenetrable shield of his merit. He permits the curse of the law to fall on himself, that we may inherit the blessing. He stands in our stead, and we in his. He was made a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. This was the chief end and design of our Saviour's sufferings.

2. The power or number of our enemies can never hurt us, unless it be by God's permission. We poor dastardly creatures, are often withheld from doing our duty by the fear of drawing on ourselves the enmity of our relations and compatriots, or the displea-

sure of our patrons and benefactors ; but why should we be afraid of men ? Were whole nations to rise up against us, if Christ does but pronounce this sentence of our deliverance, ' Let these go,' we shall be safe from their attempts. Why do we not much more fear Him, who can destroy both soul and body ; Him who can say, ' Bind this man hand and foot, and cast him into utter darkness.' Were even the gates of hell to pour forth the armed legions of darkness against us, they could not hurt a hair of our head, if Christ be our protector, and say to our enemies, ' Touch not mine anointed.'

3. Christ's prayer for his faithful servants is graciously accepted and heard by his Heavenly Father. It was but a few hours before, that the Lord Jesus had spoken these words ; and behold, they are already accomplished : For they were the words of Him, who could say with confidence, ' Father, I know that thou hearest me always.' (John xi. 42.) Now Christ had then not only prayed for his disciples and apostles, but expressly (John xvii. 20.) ' for those who through their word should believe on him.'—Therefore we also were in his generous heart ; and that faithful High Priest then bore on his breast the names of his spiritual Israel. Was he then so speedily heard in this prayer for his apostles, and shall not his prayer for the whole company of believers be granted ? The former is a sure pledge of the latter. Therefore, as Luther says, " We may justly write this comfortable text in letters of gold, as it relates to us all. For it is our glory and consolation, our treasure and pearl ; so that, for us gentiles, the whole scriptures do not afford a more comfortable saying than this."

4. Our merciful High Priest so orders our temporal circumstances, that they may not hurt or endanger our souls. Of this we have here a plain proof ; which should excite in us a firm assurance, that Christ is not unmindful of our outward circumstances ;

and only cares for the soul. Thus he will not permit some christians to fall into extreme poverty, if he foresees that their souls will suffer damage by it, as Agar (Prov. xxx. 9.) feared for himself. How inconsiderate are we! to place all our confidence in earthly patrons, in mortal men; and to make no account of this Almighty patron, who has so affectionate, so tender a concern both for our temporal and eternal welfare.

THE PRAYER.

O faithful and merciful Saviour! Thou who lookest on every soul, which the Father hath given thee, as a precious jewel, and makest it thy concern to secure and return it to him unhurt at the last day; let this inspire us with holy confidence, and exceeding joy, as knowing that no one can snatch us out of thine Almighty hand, and that thy mediatorial prayer will be fulfilled in us also, if we do but continue in thy ways. Keep us then as the apple of thine eye, that none of us may be lost; but that, one day, we may be where thou art, and see thy transcendent glory. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thy meritorious intercession. Amen.



CONSIDERATION V.

CHRIST IS APPREHENDED, AND PETER DEFENDS HIM.

‘THEN came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. When they who were with him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And, behold, one of them who were with Jesus, namely, Simon Peter, having a sword, stretched out his hand, and drew it, and

smote the servant of the High Priest, and cut off his right ear: the servant's name was Malchus.' (Matt. xxvi. 50, 51. Mark xiv. 46, 47. Luke xxii. 49, 50. John xviii. 10.)

Here is described,

First, The apprehending of Christ.

Secondly, Peter defending him.

I. In this account of the apprehending of Christ is mentioned,

1. What preceded it, 'Then came they, &c.'—Who were these that came? undoubtedly the soldiers and officers who, at the desire of the chief Priest and Elders, had been sent thither. These men, indeed, were not all of one class. Some of them, possibly, from a blind zeal, were glad to be employed in this business; especially the officers of the High Priest and Pharisees, who, from the continual invectives of their masters against Jesus of Nazareth, were unquestionably possessed with the vilest prejudices against his person. Others bore a part in this tragedy only from an implicit obedience to the command of their superiors, of whom it may be said, as of Absalom's companions, 'They went in their simplicity.' (2 Sam. xv. 11.) Thus our blessed Lord afterwards said of the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross, 'They know not what they do.' It is here farther related how they treated our blessed Saviour. For

2. 'They laid hands on Jesus and took him.' Thus they followed the advice of their treacherous guide, 'whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, take him, and lead him away safely.' From these words it is easy to infer with what rude violence they gathered about the sacred person of our blessed Redeemer, and how barbarously they hurried him away; especially, as they had been so shamefully disappointed before, notwithstanding their swords and spears, and with a single sentence thrown prostrate on the ground. This

sharpened their keen malice, and desire of revenge, so that they were like bees, which, when provoked, rush in outrageous swarms on those they attack with their envenomed stings. This comparison the Psalmist applies to the Messiah, when he says, 'They compassed me about like bees.' (Psalm cxviii. 12.)—Hence may be drawn the following inferences :

1. It is a melancholy sign of obduracy, to sin immediately after having felt God's chastising hand. Scarce were these men risen up who had been thrown to the ground by the word of Christ, but they immediately make up to him to apprehend him. It was just so with Pharoah; he scarce began to breathe after a grievous plague from the Lord, but his haughtiness returned: And so it is with the generality of mankind. While they feel the hand of God heavy upon them, drying up their moisture and consuming their strength by a lingering disease, they seem very obsequious and submissive; but as they resume their strength and spirits, their obstinacy and depravity likewise increase. They often rise worse from their sick bed, than when they were laid upon it by God's visitation. This is indeed a sign of extreme hardness and impenitence of heart; and such a one may soon expect severer chastisements. There is no state so dangerous as that when God smites them, and they feel not his friendly corrections.

2. It is a judgment from God on a sinner, when his wicked intentions are permitted to succeed.—Wicked men, indeed, put another construction upon it, 'the wicked boasteth of [obtaining] his heart's desire, and speaketh good of the covetous.' (Psalm x. 3.) This he looks upon as a mark of the divine favour, and as a token that his wicked ways please the Lord. It is true, the chief Priests and Pharisees did not a little exult on this occasion. They had long waited in vain for an opportunity of laying hands on our blessed Lord. (Luke xx. 19. John x. 39.)

But now, it is said, 'they laid hands on Jesus, and took him,' which gave them great satisfaction.

3. It is to Christ's being seized as a prisoner, that we owe our spiritual freedom. We see in the person of Christ how desperate our case would have been. Thus should we have been seized, bound, and dragged along by a multitude of evil spirits, for having once given up ourselves as voluntary slaves to satan. We should have been eternally kept as miserable captives and prisoners at his will. (2 Tim. ii. 26.) For our freedom could no other way be obtained but by our Redeemer and Surety, who appeared in our stead, and exchanged his blissful freedom for a wretched imprisonment. Therefore to his bonds we owe our manumission. Oh that we may rightly use this inestimable benefit purchased for us at so dear a rate, cast off the yoke of sin and satan, and with willing and thankful hearts, serve the great restorer of our liberty during the whole course of our lives!

II. Moreover, an account is here given of the defence made by Peter in order to rescue his master, and prevent his being carried away by the multitude. Mention is here made, first, of the attempt itself; and secondly, of the behaviour of Peter.

The persons who attempted to rescue our blessed Saviour, and prevent his being carried away, were those about him, namely, his disciples; who had, all along, imagined that Christ would save himself by flight, and pass through the crowd of his enemies, as he had done at other times. (John viii. 59.) But when they saw that the affair took a serious turn, and that their master was actually in the hands of his enemies, they then thought it was high time to rescue him, and do something in his defence. Therefore they asked him, 'Lord shall we smite with the sword?' In this proceeding there was something commendable, and something to be blamed. They

were to be commended for asking this previous question; for, probably they remembered Christ's reiterated precepts of patience and resignation. But on the other hand, they were blamable for making such a mad attempt, and with two swords, which were all they had, to make head against a strong party of soldiers. This, however, seems to have proceeded from their misunderstanding these words of Christ, 'let him that hath no sword sell his garment and buy one.' (Luke xxii. 36.) By this our Saviour intimates, that they should come into such dangerous circumstances, as to be like persons travelling among robbers, and therefore would have more need of a sword than garments; that they should be deprived, as outlaws, of the protection of magistrates, who bear the sword for the protection and safety of the innocent; and that they were to suffer all kinds of outrages. But he by no mean says, that they must handle the sword, and rashly make use of it. Hence we may learn,

1. That the motions of anger and revenge, in the time of outward sufferings, are to be looked upon as the most dangerous assaults of satan. These passions rise in us very naturally. Carnal reason pretends, that God does not immediately come down from heaven to our assistance, but that proper means must be used. This reasoning is right; but we are apt to make use of the wrong means, namely, temporal arms and illicit stratagems, and forget that in our christian warfare we are called to sufferings. These vehement impulses of passion our blessed Lord was here to expiate, by the extreme concern which he expressed on this account with regard to his disciples. But he has also acquired strength for us to struggle with these motions, and to check and overcome the incitements to private revenge.

2. The hour of suffering is the test, which displays the inward disposition of the heart. The disciples

might, at other times, reflect with some degree of surprise, how mild and gentle they were become.— But now it appears how short-lived their patience was; for immediately they are for making use of violent means to rescue their master. Many of us imagine that we are settled in a course of goodness, and think ourselves possessed of the virtues of patience and equanimity. Therefore God permits us sometimes to fall into such circumstances, by which the most inward frame of our minds is laid open. If such a one conceits himself very humble, God permits some great affair to prosper in his hands, for which he is highly applauded; and then the spirit of vanity immediately begins to stir. Does he imagine himself possessed of extraordinary patience and mildness? God permits him to be offended by others; and then his impetuous nature immediately betrays itself. When God gives a man an opportunity of knowing himself, it ought to be looked upon as a mark of his favour, and should be well used. A man under such circumstances should commune with himself, take a general review of his whole heart, and search whether any more mistakes be lurking there; and these he must encounter, overcome, and carefully exterminate.

Secondly, Here also is described the behaviour of Simon Peter, who was with Jesus, and stood by. A remarkable description, by which we may conceive, how near it must have concerned our blessed Saviour that one of his disciples should commit such a fault; and he was the very person whom he had so often warned against rashness, violence, and presumption. But Peter continued the same man; and being conscious of an entire love for his Lord and Master, he proceeded, without considering whether he made use of the proper means to execute his good intentions.

The manner of his executing his design was also

very violent and impetuous. The instrument which he made use of was a sword. How he came by it is not necessary to be enquired into. It is certain it was not customary for the disciples to wear swords.—Hence some are of opinion, that it was no more than a large knife, with which he had before killed the paschal lamb. But others, with more probability, think that the disciples on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, which was very much infested with robbers and assassins, had provided themselves with two swords; and that they carried them to Gethsemane, in order to defend themselves against the dangers they were apprehensive of. One of these swords, ‘Peter drew out of the sheath.’ He did not stay for his master’s answer to his question; but, according to his usual warmth and precipitancy, was forthwith ready; for he was desirous of being beforehand with the multitude. We may suppose, that he now recollected the promise he had made, and thought that something was to be risked in deliverance of his master, lest it should seem to be mere words. Then seeing the multitude laying their hands on Jesus, he was resolved to shew his courage; he drew his sword. But this was not all; ‘he smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.’ This man, possibly, shewed himself remarkably forward and eager in apprehending the Lord Jesus; and therefore Peter falls on him first. Probably his intention was to cleave his head asunder; but Christ averted the presumptuous stroke, so that it only cut off his ear. This temerity afterwards cost Peter dear, when a kinsman of this Malchus put him into no small consternation. (John xviii. 26.) Hence we learn,

1. That a good intention or design, when conducted by a blind zeal and temerity, often occasions a great deal of evil. That Peter meant well on this occasion, cannot be questioned. He probably concluded, that now was the time for giving a public

proof of his love to his master. But in reality it proved otherwise ; for he only increased the sufferings of Christ, injured his cause, and brought him into a suspicion of rebellious designs ; as if he had taught his disciples to repel force by force, and oppose the government. Thus he gave a handle to the enemies of his master, to charge him with stirring up the people. It may easily be conceived, that our blessed Lord was very much concerned at this procedure. However, by this he atoned for all blind and irrational zeal, and for the sins of those who rely on their own imaginary good intentions, if they repent of such sins in due time. Let us therefore seriously consider, that a good intention does not make a bad cause good, and acceptable to God ; and that a good cause should also be conducted in a just and legal manner.

2. It is a point of great wisdom under sufferings, to look to the hand of God, and not to man. Had Peter done this ; had he thought on God's immutable decree, with regard to the sufferings of the Messiah, and that man could have no power over our blessed Lord, unless it were given from above ; he would have let his sword rest in its place. But alas ! we act no better ; nay, if a man under sufferings be exhorted to look up to God for redress, a dispute immediately arises, and the suffering party is apt to maintain, that it is allowable to repel force by force. Thus carnal reason will be always making shifts and evasions ; whereas the nearest way to extricate ourselves out of calamity is to adore the mighty hand of God that presseth us, and to humble ourselves under it.

3. God so over-rules the faults of his servants, that no greater damage ensues from them than he has determined to permit. Here the omnipotence of Christ turns aside Peter's rash blow, so that it only cuts off an ear. Thus novices in religion frequently commit many faults, which God, for wise purposes,

is pleased to permit; but so tempers and restrains them, that his cause may not be greatly injured by them. How gracious is the Lord, who spreads out his hands to support us, when we fall inadvertently.

4. The faults of those christians that are weak, ought not to be charged on religion in general. We may be sure Christ was blamed and censured for this action of Peter, his disciple. This, said they among themselves, is a specimen of the doctrines of this Jesus of Nazareth. This is one of his old disciples; and where should he have learned such behaviour, but from his master? But who will presume to say, that the enemies of Christ argued rightly on this occasion? Yet this is the way of the world, when any religious person commits a fault, christianity in general is reproached with it.

THE PRAYER.

Eternal thanks be ascribed to thee, most faithful Saviour, for thy patience, long-suffering, and forbearance towards thy poor children. May we also partake of it amidst our temerity and impatience, our proneness to anger and revenge! Cast us not from thee for our manifold infirmities; but by thy Holy Spirit continually strengthen us, and make us more patient, wise, and considerate, so that we may reflect honour on thy holy religion, and make our light to shine before men. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VI.

CHRIST'S MILD REPROOF TO HIS DISCIPLES.

‘BUT Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath; for all they that take the sword shall perish

with the sword. The cup which the father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. xxvi. 52, 53, 54. Luke xxii. 51. John xxviii. 11.)

By these words we find, that Christ reproved his disciples, who were for repelling force by force; and this he does,

First, By his action.

Secondly, By his words.

I. The action was, first, our blessed Lord's kind reparation of the fault imprudently committed by Peter, by healing the ear which he had cut off. Here we may observe,

1. The preparation to the action. Jesus said, 'Suffer ye thus far.' Some, indeed, suppose, that Christ addressed these words to his disciples, enjoining them not to oppose the accomplishment of his sufferings, but to permit the Roman soldiers to fulfil what the Father had decreed concerning him. But his discourse seems rather directed to the soldiers. 'Forbear whilst ——,' as if he intreated, and at the same time commanded them to leave his hands at liberty, until he had healed the man's ear.

2. The action itself. 'And he touched his ear.' It was usual with the Lord Jesus to touch those diseased persons whom he cured, and by his miraculous touch to impart his healing virtue to them; (Matt. viii. 3. ix. 29.) by this he shewed, that his human nature was endued with the fulness of salvation and power. Thus, in this instance, by touching the ear, it is restored in its place, and in a miraculous manner instantaneously healed. By this miracle he intended to give an actual demonstration, that he by no means approved of Peter's indiscreet zeal. Hence we may draw the following edifying inferences,

1. The services and benefits which we do to others, must be accompanied with an affectionate behaviour. When Christ, in this instance, was for exerting his benevolence, he previously in the mildest terms, intreated his enemies, that they would a little while forbear binding his sacred hands, and allow him just time to repair the damage which had been inadvertently done. Worldlings and courtiers are perfect masters of this art; and accompany all the favours which they do to others, with every engaging circumstance, with every thing that can tend to make them be idolized by others. But this courtly complaisance proceeds from false and selfish views: Whereas true Christians are to observe it from purer motives; and when they do any spiritual or temporal kindnesses to others, they should by their affability, meekness, and discretion, so prepare their minds, that the kindness shewn them may have the desired effect. This seems, indeed, to be only a rule of outward conduct in life: But the observance of it requires a considerable portion of divine grace; and certainly it must cost us no small share of self-denial, so to behave towards our neighbour, who stands in need of our assistance, as if we accounted it a favour, that he will accept of our good offices.

2. Our blessed Saviour often repairs the damages, rashly committed by his imprudent disciples. Of this we have here an example in the healing of the ear, which had been cut off. The children of God should indeed behave with circumspection in all things, and be the more cautious, as so many eyes are intent in watching them: and on any slip of theirs, as many slanderous tongues are ready to blazon abroad their shame. Though Christians must suffer themselves to be reproached by the world, as if they accounted themselves quite perfect and infallible; yet none more ingenuously acknowledge, that they fail in many things, and that they stand in need of a merci-

ful mediator, not only to plead their cause before the divine tribunal, but also to correct their failings, and make them obtain favour with men. Thus we should in all our actions proceed with prudence and caution, and reflect that we walk among snares. But when it does happen, that we do inadvertently make a false step, we ought not to be utterly discouraged. As satan is particularly watchful over souls of a melancholy disposition; is very dextrous in magnifying the dangers arising from their failings, and the punishment to be apprehended from them; we should turn away our eyes from the subtile tempter, and say, "It is not against thee that I have sinned, but against my indulgent Creator; besides, I have a merciful Saviour, who can again make good what I have erred in." Thus, after a sincere repentance for the fault we have rashly committed, let us lay hold on the merit of Christ by faith, and cheerfully proceed to follow after peace and holiness of life.

3. To do good to our enemies is an important point in our imitation of Jesus Christ in his sufferings. Here the blessed Jesus with his healing hand touches his ear, who had stretched out his impious hand to seize and bind him. This was a pattern of true meekness and patience. This bitter enemy of our blessed Lord had well deserved to have the hand which he had stretched out to lay hold of him withered, as the hand of Jeroboam was, when he signified his order for seizing the Prophet: 1 Kings xiii 4.) For certainly one greater than a prophet was here. But the meek and merciful Saviour overlooks all the outrages committed against him, touches the wounded ear, and with a touch, heals it. Should any one of us have behaved with such unparalleled mildness? It is hardly probably that we would. Alas! with what difficulty does that lesson, 'Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you,' find admission into the human heart! The bare abstaining from aveng-

ing ourselves, is a hard and disagreeable task to flesh and blood, which is so prone to revenge. The least offence against a poor worm is often atoned for by blood; whereas God is offended every day, and yet is patient and long suffering. But to love our enemies, and even to do them good, is what we can hardly digest. It is certain, that to the undiscerning multitude it would appear highly ridiculous and absurd, (especially whilst the sense and pain of the injury is still recent) should any one say to them, Your enemy who injured you is at present in great want; be so charitable as to go and assist him. The answer would be, How! shall I help him? I must be a fool, indeed, to do him any good office, who has done me so much injury; shall I encourage him in his wickedness? Should it be replied to such a man in his resentment, But Christ has commanded us to do good to our enemies, he would laugh his adviser to scorn, and say, if any one will be such a fool, he deserves to be ill-treated, &c. Behold, thus the doctrines that proceeded from the mouth of our divine teacher are ridiculed among those who call themselves Christians! though they are highly rational, and agreeable to the principles of real prudence.

II. Christ having repaired the fault committed by his sanguine disciples, he reproves them likewise with words, which, though they were particularly directed to Peter, yet were spoken so as to be heard by the other disciples. In this reproof is contained,

First, A command: 'Put up the sword in its sheath.' In these words, our blessed Lord, 1. disapproves of what Peter had done; as if he had said, Away with the sword; do not vainly think to defend me with weapons. 2. He restrains him from proceeding to further violence; for otherwise Peter, in his rage, would not have stopped at this first attempt. It was to rescue his master, that he had drawn his sword; but Christ here in commanding him to put

up his sword into its place, immediately calms his fury and indignation. To this command our blessed Lord immediately subjoins,

Secondly, The motives which should induce Peter to comply with this command.

1. He represents to him the danger of his procedure: 'For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' To take the sword is, in an illegal manner, to assume the power of using the sword for revenge. God has committed the sword to the civil magistrate; (Rom. xiii. 4.) and whoever intrudes on his office, as it were, takes the sword out of his hand. Of such a one, it is here said, 'he shall perish by the sword,' *i. e.* the civil power will be under a necessity of using the sword against him, and as he has shed man's blood, of retaliating the injury on him. (Gen. ix. 6.) Thus Christ represents to Peter the danger of his rash attempt, namely, how easily he might have taken away the life of the high priest's servant, and consequently have fallen into the hand of the civil power, and be punished as an assassin or an evil doer.

2. Our blessed Lord represents to him, that this proceeding is unbecoming and sinful, as it tended to obstruct him in his obedience to his Father, and his great design, viz. the redemption of mankind; 'The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?' He often calls his sufferings a cup; (Matt. xx. 22. in loco, &c.) by which expression, according to the opinion of some commentators, he alludes to a capital punishment among the ancients, of giving malefactors a cup filled with a poisonous draught.* These sufferings, he considers as sent by his Father, who, according to his predetermined counsel, had appointed them; (Acts ii. 23.) and therefore he asks,

* This punishment was in use among the Athenians, as appears by the death of *Socrates*, &c. *H.*

Shall I not submit? Shall I withdraw myself from them, after having in the council of the Father offered myself for this purpose? Blush Peter, that thou wouldest, as it were, by violence, make me break my promise.

3. Christ shews him that this resistance is unnecessary: 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of Angels?' As if he had said, I do not stand in any need of your defence; were I inclined to it, I might have a much more powerful assistance. It is but speaking the word, and I could have of my Father, instead of twelve apostles, twelve legions of angels; and consequently a formidable host, which in an instant could dissipate all the power of mine enemies. A single angel slew an hundred eighty and five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; (2 Kings xix. 35.) what then would not twelve legions, or fifty thousand angels, be able to perform.

4. He represents to him, that it is impossible to accomplish his design: 'Thus it must be.' As if our Lord had said, God has determined it, and foretold it in the holy scriptures. Now God cannot act contrary to his word, nor forfeit his veracity. Besides, the human race can be redeemed in no other manner, at least my Father has chosen this method; therefore to endeavour to obstruct the wise decree of God would be a vain and fruitless attempt. This argument must at last have carried with it a decisive force. Hence let us learn the following truths.

1. The Lord Jesus, indeed, forgives his servants their sins, but at the same time reproves their evil intentions. (Psalm xcix. 18.) The error committed by Peter, and the other disciples, in these embarrassed circumstances, were pardoned; however, they did not go without a mild reproof: but our blessed Saviour afterwards upbraided them no farther about

it. He knoweth our frame and all its weaknesses. God indulgently pardons the failings of his poor servants ; especially when they are under difficulties and afflictions, and the world is most void of pity and compassion. It often happens in times of persecution that some indiscretions are committed by christians, which are graciously forgiven by the Father of mercies, but are by no means to be justified or commended. It is a great consolation to christians under their sufferings, that they have a merciful High Priest, who, with the merit of his meekness and patience, atones for the errors they commit under the pressure of afflictions and persecutions.

2. Our reproofs of our neighbour should proceed from a concern for his welfare, mixt with mildness and gentleness. Christ had sufficient cause to give Peter a sharp reprimand, and to reproach him with the injury he did his cause ; to shew him how he brought a blot on his innocence, and that the high priest's servant could not have so much suffered, as Christ himself, by his violence. But our blessed Lord contents himself with alledging the reasons, why he could not approve of his rashness, charging him not to proceed in his indiscretion. He is not silent on the occasion, as his enemies would then have immediately concluded that he approved of the action ; neither does his approbation carry him beyond the bounds of meekness and gentleness. It is particularly remarkable, that our Saviour does not reproach Peter with having aggravated his suffering by this action, which, in fact, was the case. In this our blessed Lord sets us an example of patience, when his children should endure sufferings by the indiscretion of their acquaintance, or of those with whom they are connected.

3. In order to stand our ground in time of sufferings, we are not to consider the insults of men, but the hand of God that sends them. When our Saviour says ' Shall I not drink the cup which my father hath

given me?' he directs Peter's thoughts from the hand of men, or the instruments, to the counsels of God, who had appointed these sufferings for him. This consideration should make us patient under sufferings; for if we consider by whom they are sent on us, it will sweeten the bitterest potion. It is a cup mixed by the healing hand of our Heavenly Father, who does not prepare poison for his children, but the most efficacious medicine.

4. To acquiesce in the sufferings sent by God is a sign of great increase in holiness. Christ says, 'Shall I not drink the cup?' This is of the same import with that passage of scripture, 'I will receive the cup of salvation.' (Psalm cxii. 13.) It is from our Saviour's complacency in his sufferings, that he disapproves of Peter's attempt to hinder them. When this love is shed abroad in the heart of a christian, he cheerfully submits to suffer for Christ's sake; for he is sensible that by such an acquiescence, he acquires a brighter jewel in his future crown of glory.

5. In the greatest sufferings, it is an inexpressible comfort to the servants of God to reflect, that they have a Saviour to whom all the angels of God are ministering spirits. Here our blessed Lord declines the service of angels and will not accept of their assistance, because the decisive hour of his suffering was now come. But he has by this means acquired for us the protection of angels in our sufferings. He now is in an exalted state, in which angels, principalities, and powers, are subject to him, and reverentially adore the human nature united with the Godhead.—When a Christian is in any great danger or affliction, he considers that his Saviour has numberless legions of angels under his command, and that he will send away one of those glorious messengers to help or support him in his distress. 'For the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;' (Psalm. xxxiv. 7.) and these

ministering spirits are sent forth, to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. (Heb. i. 14.)

THE PRAYER.

THANKS be to thee, O my Saviour, who wouldst not permit the course of thy sufferings to be obstructed, lest at the same time my redemption and salvation should be prevented. Praised be thy name for this cheerful readiness to drink of thy cup of sufferings for the welfare of mankind, that I might not eternally drink the phials of God's wrath, and the lees of his bitter cup. Grant that I may patiently and willingly submit to all sufferings for thy sake, and let thy holy angels assist and support me under them. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VII.

CHRIST IS BOUND, AND HIS REMONSTRANCE TO HIS ENEMIES.

‘THEN the band, and the captain, and the officers of the Jews, took Jesus, and bound him. In the same hour Jesus said to the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, who were come to him, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves to take me?’ (Matt. xxvi. 55. Mark xiv. 48. Luke xxii. 52. John xviii. 12.)

These words exhibit to us,
First, The binding of Christ.
Secondly, His remonstrance.

I. In the binding of Christ, are to be observed,

1. The instruments of this cruelty; who were,

First, The multitude, namely, of the Roman soldiers, who were in garrison in Antony's castle, and

during this high festival, were to watch the temple to prevent any insurrection. (Acts xxi. 30, &c.)

Secondly, The captain, or commander in chief. Though it is not probable that the whole body was ordered on this service, but only a part; yet the commander in chief was present.

Thirdly, The officers of the Jews, *i. e.* the officers of the Jewish Sandehrim, and other domestics of the scribes and pharisees, who had been sent by their masters of which I have already taken notice in the first Consideration; so that Christ was surrounded by a numerous body of men.

2. The cruel action itself. 'They took Jesus,' or they laid hold on him on all sides, and so hemmed him in that he might not escape, and 'bound him,' With what rudeness and violence this was done, may be conjectured from the following prophecy, (Psalm xxii. 12, 13.) 'Many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round: They gaped upon me with their mouths as a ravening, and a roaring lion. They compassed me about like bees — They thrust sore at me that I might fall.' (Psalm cxviii. 12, 13.) This binding must have been the more painful; our blessed Saviour having, but a little before, been extremely weakened by his violent agony and bloody sweat, when he lay with his face on the ground, and, as it were, rolled in his blood; when the sorrows of hell compassed him about, and the snares of death prevented him. (Psalm xviii. 5.) And now also these barbarous, inhuman soldiers came on him, and bound him with cords. We shall here make the following practical observations.

1. The greater love any one has for Christ, the more attentive will he be in considering the particular circumstances of his sufferings. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who loved Jesus with a most ardent affection, is the only Evangelist who takes notice of the binding of our Saviour. An affection-

ate soul does not only consider the sufferings of Christ in general, but dwells on every circumstance of his meritorious passion.

2. Christ and his members are still looked upon by the men of this world, as people whom they cannot treat with too much severity. It is said, 'They took Jesus.' Thus the world deals with his members; for they are meek and patient, not repelling force by force, do not return railing for railing; but, according to the pattern set by their Lord and Master, tamely resign themselves to sufferings. Therefore the world is eager to abuse their patience and heroic submission. "Let us, say they, examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience." (Eccl. ii. 19.) But woe to him who suffers himself to be employed as an instrument of the devil in such execrable doings; for however patiently Christians may bear all things, there is another who will certainly avenge them.

3. The minutest circumstance in the sufferings of Christ receives an importance from the dignity of the suffering person. He, who is here bound, is the 'Captain of the Lord's host,' (Josh. v. 14. 'the Prince of the Kings of the earth.' (Rev. i. 5.) Here those hands are fettered, which spread out the heavens, and founded the earth, which loosen the bands of Orion; (Job xxxviii. 31.) those hands which never did any hurt, or rather those hands which are continually open to satisfy every living thing with plenteousness; those hands whose all-healing touch had cleansed so many lepers, and restored feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind. We must attentively consider these particulars, before we can set a due value on the bonds of Christ. This is the method the Holy Spirit observes in foretelling the sufferings and contemptuous treatment of the Messiah. He is first introduced speaking in this manner: (Isaiah l. 2, 3.) 'At my

rebuke I dry up the sea : I make the rivers a wilderness :— I clothe the heavens with blackness ; and I make sackcloth their covering.'—Then follows (ver. 6.) 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair : I hid not my face from shame and spitting.' Thus should we consider every circumstance of Christ's sufferings.

4. By the bonds of the Son of God, our love of an unbounded freedom was to be expiated. In order rightly to consider these bonds of Christ, we must look back to the garden of Eden ; where our greatest happiness consisted in an implicit obedience to God, a dependence on him, and a resignation of ourselves to be drawn by him with cords of love. But these happy bonds we impiously cast away from us ; we would be our own masters, and were above being in a state of dependence. We broke asunder the gentle bonds of obedience, transgressed both tables of the law, and made ourselves servants to satan, being sold under sin. (2 Tim. ii. 24.) This forbidden and sinful lust of an unlimited freedom brought these bonds upon our blessed Saviour, who was bound in our stead.

5. Whoever considers the bonds of Christ, in faith, is thereby moved to a voluntary obedience to his commands. The Scripture says, 'the love of Christ constraineth us.' (2 Cor. v. 14.) Hence we may learn to esteem it an honour to serve the Lord Christ, whose service is perfect freedom ; and if we were left to an entire liberty, we should by no means abuse it. Whoever, therefore, still feels himself bound by tyrannizing lusts, and other enslaving cords of satan, let him, like her who had been eighteen years bound by satan, come with his bonds to Christ, and like her he will obtain freedom and relief. (Luke xiii. 11, 12.)

II. In our blessed Saviour's remonsttance is to be considered,

1. The time when he spoke it, 'In that same hour,' namely, when he was already loaded with bonds and fetters. That he might not appear to undergo them with any repugnancy, after they had bound him, he convinced them of the injustice of their proceeding.

2. The intent of his remonstrance. He was willing to shew that he was innocent (so that there was no need of binding him so hastily,) and that this indignity did not proceed from his enemies' malice only, but, the hour being come, God permitted and allowed them so to do, after they had long endeavoured it in vain.

3. The persons to whom he directs his remonstrance. Who were those that came to apprehend him; particularly the Chief Priests, *i. e.* some of the principal priests, and heads of the four and twenty orders into which David had divided the priests; the captains of the temple, who had the superintendancy of the guard of the Levites in the temple, and, by order from the Sanhedrim, were to apprehend those whom they directed to be taken into custody; and lastly, the elders of the Sanhedrim. So that he does not so much address himself to the Roman soldiery, as to the Jewish rulers, at whose solicitation the Roman soldiers had been sent on this errand. The latter attended the officers, lest they should again come back without performing their orders; who being asked before, Why they had not brought Jesus? They answered, 'Never man spake like this man.' (John vii. 45, 46.)

4. The purport of our Lord's remonstrance. At first he reproves them for coming out against him with such a force, as if he was one of those murderers or robbers who swarmed at that time in Judea; and shews that by such a proceeding, they insulted him without a cause, and treated him as one who intended to oppose the civil power, &c. as will be shewn

more at large, in the following Consideration. Hence we may learn the following truths :

1. The world, though it may bind the hands of the persecuted witnesses of truth, cannot always at the same time bind their tongues from confessing the truth. Christ gives up his hands to the cords, but his tongue he keeps free, according to his previous resolution, 'I have not refrained my lips.' (Psalm xl. 9.) Thus in the history of the martyrs, we frequently find that before, and in the midst of their sufferings, they exhorted the spectators in the most pathetic manner : of this their tormentors, especially the Popish persecutors, were so apprehensive, that they often prevented them from speaking, by stopping their mouths, or even cutting out their tongues ; or caused drums to beat during the executions, that the people might not hear, and be convinced by, their reasonings.

2. The men of this world, in their war against Christ, make no difficulty of laying aside, for a time, their ease and dignity. It was not very creditable for the chief priests, the captains of the temple, and elders, to be seen in this affair amongst a crowd of soldiers, and the meaner officers of a court of justice ; but as long as it is to act against Christ, they forego their ease, their conveniency, and the respect due to their characters.

THE PRAYER.

O THOU most wise, and most prudent, who at a proper season didst vindicate thine own innocence, and thy Heavenly Father's honour : though at other times, when calumniated and reproached, thou didst not open thy mouth. By the former instance, thou hast obtained for us the right of confidently asserting our own innocence and integrity ; and by the latter, thou hast atoned for our vain excuses and ill-grounded apologies. Thanks and praise be to thee,

O blessed Jesus, for this example proposed for our imitation. Teach us to speak, or to be silent, in right season, as thy honour, and the real good of our neighbour, may require. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VIII.

A CONTINUANCE OF CHRIST'S REMONSTRANCE,
MENTIONED IN THE PRECEDING CONSIDERA-
TION.

'I WAS daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye took me not: But this is your hour, and the power of darkness; and all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.'

These words contain the rest of our Saviour's remonstrance to his enemies. Here he gives them to understand, that this power of binding him was not owing to their own will and pleasure, but proceeded from a higher hand; for which end he shews them,

First, The circumstances of the time past.

Secondly, Those of the present hour.

As to the time past, our blessed Lord tells them,

First, What his former behaviour had been; 'I was daily with you teaching in the temple.' In which we are to consider,

1. What our Saviour did. 'I was with you teaching.' Christ, or the Messiah, had been promised as a great prophet, (Deut. xviii. 18.) and as a teacher of righteousness, (Joel ii. 23.) which sacred office he had hitherto discharged with the greatest assiduity. What doctrines he taught we may learn from his very enemies, 'Thou teachest the way of God in truth;' (Matt. xxii. 16.) and how he inculcated his divine doctrines, we may gather from St. Matthew, 'He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes,' (Matt. vii. 29.) says the evangelist.

2. The place where he taught. This was the temple ; not in the sanctuary, much less in the Holy of Holies : For into the former none but the priests were admitted ; and the high priest only entered into the latter, and that but once a year. But as Christ was not a priest of the tribe of Levi, he was by the law of Moses excluded from those places. By the temple, therefore, here is to be understood the court of the congregation ; which afforded an opportunity, and likewise proper places, to instruct the people. In this place was a particular synagogue, where, on the Sabbath-days, and great festivals, the law was read and expounded by the Priests and Levites : and this was the place, where our blessed Lord, when he was but twelve years of age, was found amongst the doctors. There were also several cloisters or porticos in this place ; particularly that called Solomon's porch, where the people assembled in rainy weather. To this portico Jesus often repaired with his disciples ; (John x. 23. Acts iii. 11. v. 12.) for this place was extremely well adapted for preaching the gospel at once both to the Jews and Gentiles.

3. The time when he taught ; and this is expressed by the word daily or every day. It is plain, that this is to be limited to the time when Christ was at Jerusalem, and especially the days immediately preceding his passion ; during which time, St. Luke tells us, that ' he taught daily in the temple.' Chap. xix. 47.) Our blessed Lord was for employing the short time that remained of his exemplary life, in fully declaring to the people the message he had received from his Father. This circumstance, the blessed Jesus represents to his enemies as a convincing proof that he is no assassin, or moreover of seditions ; for such persons generally shun all public places, and conceal themselves in woods, caves, and unfrequented places. He further shews them that their proceeding was wrong ; since, if he had taught any erroneous

tenets, or any pernicious doctrine, they might have taken him in the fact in the temple, and brought him to a legal trial, without having recourse to military power, and coming upon him in the night. But our blessed Saviour adds,

Secondly, What had before passed on their side, ‘You laid no hold on me, ye took me not.’ Christ does not say this by way of boasting; for it was not the want of will, but of the power to take him, that had prevented the designs of his enemies. Our blessed Lord was in such favour and esteem with the people, on account of his doctrines and surprizing miracles, that they were afraid lest the people should stone them. (Luke xx. 6.) This was the check that curbed their fury, or else they would have laid hands on our blessed Lord much sooner; and notwithstanding this restraint, they could not forbear sending their disciples and officers to apprehend him, (John vii. 25.) though they returned without effecting their design, because his hour was not yet come. This, therefore, might have convinced them that, powerful as they were, they could not effect what they pleased; but could do nothing unless power were given them from above. This leads us to the following considerations.

1. The profanation of edifices consecrated to divine worship, should not withhold us from frequenting them. The temple was at that time profaned in the most abominable manner, so that Christ himself calls it ‘a den of thieves’: (Luke xix. 46.) Nevertheless, our blessed Lord is daily present in the temple, and there performs his prophetic office. The churches in which our public service is performed, as they are appointed for teaching, and performing the worship of God, bear some resemblance to the temple of Jerusalem; and indeed there is but too great a resemblance betwixt them, with regard to profane actions. When the church is made, as it were, the theatre for some of the congregation to exhibit all

their finery, and feast their wanton eyes with ogling and gazing about ; while others are whispering, or using indecent gestures, and others sleeping, &c. it cannot be denied, but that they are shamefully profaned. Such a sight may induce some more austere than religious to absent themselves from places of worship, out of a pretence that they were more offended than edified there ; but the great example of our blessed Saviour should move such persons not to forbear coming to hear the word of God, and to pay their adoration in his sanctuary ; by which means, they will not only be edified themselves, but set a good example to others.

2. True Christians do not shun the light ; but rather endeavour to walk so openly, that their words and works may be manifest to every one. Christ, indeed, had taught before in the wilderness, on a mountain, and on board a ship ; but his teaching was always public ; nor did he exclude any one who was willing to hear him. But on the days preceding his passion, when his enemies were plotting his death, and forming their bloody design, so far was our blessed Lord from shunning the light, that he taught publicly in the temple, where every one might hear and examine his doctrine to which he likewise appeals. (John xviii. 20.) Nay, he had long before invalidated the censure of clandestine assemblies, by the mouth of the prophet, ‘ I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth.’ (Isaiah xlv. 19.) Our Lord and Master had no need of concealing himself in corners, and carrying on designs clandestinely ; neither should Christians deviate from his great example. How glorious an apology is it, when one can say with St. Paul, ‘ I have lived in all good conscience before God to this day !’ (Acts xxiii. 1.) How honourable is it to be able, with godly simplicity, to carry on our affairs openly, and in the eyes of the whole world, without having recourse to clandestine doings. The children

of darkness can by no means bear the public eye; for 'he who doeth evil hateth the light.' Those only skulk, and hide their actions, who walk in wicked ways; 'for it is a shame to speak of those things, that are done by them in secret.' It is certain, that if the works of many wicked persons were to be publicly known, they would appear so extremely shocking, that every one would point at them. Where is the worldling to be found, who is always ready to declare his secret thoughts and intentions? What sinful, atheistical, wanton, and impious thoughts would then come to light? But the children of God walk in light, and need not fear that their actions, or even their words and thoughts, should be made known to any one; for 'they are wrought in God.' (John iii. 21.)

3. Wicked men will be charged with such sins, as they would willingly have committed, but could not for want of opportunity. God, indeed, does not always prevent the commission of sins by external or natural means, (for he deals with men as rational creatures) though he sometimes interferes, when other circumstances require it. Hence it often comes to pass, that a wicked man forms a resolution of committing a sin, and before-hand pleases himself with the thoughts of it; but afterwards, for want of an opportunity, he is obliged, though much against his will, to drop, or at least postpone it to a convenient time. But sin, when once fixedly determined in the human heart, is already committed in the sight of God. For both in good and evil designs, the great searcher of hearts looks on the will as the deed, though it be never put in execution. This was the case with the enemies of Christ. They had not laid hands on him in the temple; but this was because it had not been in their power: their hands, to their extreme mortification, were tied up by the fear of the people. When it sensibly touches the heart of a sinner, that he cannot perpetrate the wicked fact he intended.

it is a certain sign that God will impute to him that sin, as if it had been committed. True virtue does not consist in merely abstaining from evil, but in a voluntary aversion to it. A truly noble disposition of mind shews itself in willingly and freely, for the honour of Christ, abstaining and shunning every evil, with every opportunity, convenience, and ability of committing it.

II. Christ lays before his enemies the circumstance of the present juncture, which is to be considered,

First, Absolutely and in itself. 'This is your hour, &c.' By the hour, is to be understood the time appointed for our Saviour's sufferings by his Heavenly Father. (John xii. 27.) This critical time, which for its shortness is called the hour. Christ in another place terms 'HIS hour.' (John vii. 30. and viii. 20.) But here he says to his enemies, 'This is YOUR hour,' i. e. the time which you have long wished for, and which is allowed you for putting your horrid purposes in execution; the time which you most impiously abuse for the perpetration of your blood-thirsty designs, in which you set aside God and the fear of him, from before your eyes. In your opinion this is a fortunate hour, in which the wicked scheme you have been so long contriving is brought to bear, according to your desire. But it was in reality a very unfortunate hour for them. For it is added, 'and the power of darkness,' i. e. the time when God has permitted the prince of darkness to prompt you to this unparalleled wickedness. But our blessed Saviour likewise shews how the present hour is to be considered.

Secondly, With respect to the divine decree.—'And all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled;' namely, those passages in which it is foretold, that the Messiah should be surrounded, as it were, by ravenous dogs and roar-

ing lions; should be apprehended and ill-treated. But it must not from hence be concluded, that the Jews were under a necessity of sinning, that the scripture might be fulfilled. This inference would be incompatible with the justice and holiness of God, whose presence foresaw the wickedness of the Jews, and inserted in the scriptures their method of conducting their impious designs. If the Jews had acted otherwise, the event would have been also otherwise predicted. But their behaviour on this occasion was a confirmation, that God caused the prophets to foretel only such things as were strictly true concerning this event. Hence we deduce the following truths.

1. He, who looks upon the hours as his own, will be seduced to many sins by such an error. This our Lord hints at by the words, 'this is your hour;' As if he had said, this is the time which you have laid hold on to perpetrate your impious designs. Time is not our own property, but belongs to God. For every hour, every moment of time, we are to give account to him; for as we are but stewards of all his other gifts, so likewise are we of this; which is of infinite value, as our eternal welfare depends upon the right use of it. With what care and caution therefore should we improve our time, that not one fleeting hour may slip away, in which we do not sow some good seed towards a harvest in a blessed eternity.

2. When men imagine themselves to be in a situation of doing their will with the greatest freedom, they are then the greatest slaves of Satan. The Jews, in the instance before us, seem to have their hands at full liberty, stretching them out without any controul, to lay hold of, and bind our blessed Lord; but he shews them that they are under the power of the prince of darkness, whom the Almighty permits to rule and drive them according to his own will.—
'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin;

but he whom the Son has made free, is free indeed.* (John viii. 34, 36.)

3. The Scripture is a book, in which the actions and catastrophe of the wicked are set forth by an omniscient spirit. This is done, indeed, in common and usual phrases; but in the Scriptures every one may behold his own image, and at the same time learn what will be his end, if he continues in his wicked ways. 'There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked; ye are still the same, and do not fear God; the wicked go on from evil to worse, they sink down, and their end is terrible; he who believeth not is condemned,' &c. How deplorable a consideration is it, that the Scripture is thus fulfilled in so many! that the curse and punishment denounced by God against his enemies, should fall on such multitudes. On the other hand, how joyful is it to experience the accomplishment of those precious promises, which God has graciously made to his friends and servants.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and most loving Saviour, who didst permit the afflictive and dark hour to come upon thee, in which satan had power over thine enemies, to stretch out their hands to bind thee; by which thou hast acquired for us freedom from the power of darkness, so that it shall neither condemn us before the tribunal of God, nor triumph over our souls. Thanks be to thee for this unspeakable grace! Grant that we may live as true subjects to thee in thy kingdom of light and peace, that we may evermore serve thee in holiness and righteousness of life, for the sake of thy meritorious submission. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IX.

CHRIST DESERTED BY HIS DISCIPLES.

‘**THEN** all the disciples forsook him and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.’ (Matt. xxvi. 56. Mark xiv. 51, 52.)

Here is related how the disciples deserted their Lord and Master. These words exhibit to us

First, The flight of his apostles.

Secondly, That of another young man, who was his disciple.

I. In this account of the flight of the apostles is mentioned,

1. The time: ‘Then,’ i. e. when the blessed Jesus was not only bound, but led away by the multitude. Hitherto the disciples had imagined, that the Lord would disengage himself from the hands of his enemies; that, like Samson, he would break their cords, or pass through the midst of the multitude unobserved; and while they entertained these flattering hopes, they were also ready to make good their promise, and risk all for his sake: But seeing that their master yielded himself to his enemies; that he was bound and hurried along like a common helpless man; their courage failed them, and all their thoughts turned on their own safety.

2. The persons who fled. These were all the disciples, and consequently the intrepid Peter himself, who had made such mighty protestations that he was ready to die with Jesus; John, who was otherwise faithful to his master, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who, but a few hours before, at the eating of the

paschal Lamb, had leaned on his sacred bosom ; and James, who, together with John his brother, had offered to drink the cup which Jesus was to drink of, and be baptized with his baptism ; (Matt. xx. 22.) in short all his disciples to a man.

3. The manner of their flight. ‘ They forsook him and fled.’ If we recollect that Christ had foretold this flight, saying, ‘ All ye shall be offended because of me,’ (Matt. xxvi. 31.) it will appear, that this flight was accompanied with an offence taken at their Lord and Master. “ Alas !” said they amongst themselves, “ what poor mistaken men are we ? We looked on Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and the promised Messiah, who was to redeem Israel from slavery ; but in all appearance, our expectations were ill grounded, and now our former hope will be frustrated. If he were the Son of God, it is not to be supposed that his Heavenly Father would let his enemies thus triumph over him.” Thus were they offended at the sufferings of Christ, and did not think that the discharge which our blessed Lord had given them by saying, ‘ let these go,’ would suffice for their safety ; but they also hastened to save themselves, and every one made the best of his way to his home. In this were fulfilled the prophecies concerning this flight, and the Messiah’s being deserted by his friends. (Zach. xiii. 7. Psalm lxix. 8. John xvi. 32. Mark xiv. 27.) Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. Men little think how weak they are, until God permits them to fall into such circumstances, as to give scandalous proofs of their weakness and irresolution. How often had our blessed Lord declared to his disciples the weakness of their nature, and they would not believe it ? Peter contradicted his Master time after time, and thought, that though he could not be answerable for his brethren, yet he could vouch for himself that he would bear his Master

company to prison and to death ; and with this sanguine presumption he also inflamed the rest of the disciples, so that they all made the like protestation. But what they would not believe, they were to experience to their sorrow. Thus also is it with many Christians, whose natural self-love is a flattering mirror, which exhibits a much more beautiful appearance than they in reality have. We entertain such an high opinion of our own hearts, that we think them proof against every attack. The secret delusion that lurks in the heart, we are not willing to hear of.— Thus, there is no end of palliatives ; and every one of us industriously gathers fig-leaves to cover his own nakedness. We confidently venture ourselves in so many conjunctures, which may be an occasion of falling ; and yet, at other times, we are ready to plead the frailty of human nature, when we are exhorted to greater earnestness in religion. The measures which God takes for bringing such persons to a knowledge of themselves, and their inability, is, to permit them to fall into such circumstances, as will lay open the inmost recesses of their hearts : and, for their amendment, to suffer them to commit such faults, as must evidently shew them, that their hearts are not so sound as they imagine. Happy is he, who abases himself in the spirit of real humility, so that God has no occasion to humble him.

2. The disciples, in their flight, are an instance of the changeable fickleness of our hearts. Now they are elate, and the next moment spiritless and desponding. Before the approach of danger, the disciples were rash and daring ; but in time of danger, faint-hearted and irresolute. This is a true representation of the human heart. In time of persecution, it is easily seen who are the true followers of Christ. Though the disciples had an assurance from Christ himself, that their enemies should not hurt them, yet they basely fly. But we have not only one,

but a hundred great and precious promises, that God will be with us in distress; and have before us numberless examples, that he whose hope is in God shall never be confounded; yet in time of danger, how timorous and fluctuating are our hearts? On the first appearance of any calamity, like Jacob, we prepare for flight. It becomes us with sorrow to own, that we have but little confidence in God, and that by our mean distrust, we have no reliance on his promises, which, notwithstanding, are all 'yea and Amen.'

3. Christ, by being thus forsaken by his best and most intimate friends, has, upon our sincere repentance, atoned for the infidelity we have been guilty of towards God and man. We have forsaken God, the inexhaustible source of life and happiness, our best friend, and greatest benefactor, and therefore have deserved to be eternally forsaken by him. But the blessed Jesus intervened as the expiation of our infidelity, and, by this desertion which he suffered, has atoned for all the breaches of trust we have been guilty of towards God and our neighbour. How often is it seen, that in time of persecution, even the ministers of God are possessed with such timidity and weakness, and have so little reliance on God's providence, that they basely fly, and forsake their flock. But this desertion they afterwards frequently lament with floods of tears; and under the reproaches of conscience, have experienced the enlivening comforts arising from the merits of Christ, who was forsaken by his own disciples.

4. When we are abandoned by all men in our distress, the remembrance of our blessed Lord's being forsaken should powerfully support our drooping spirits. The nearer the blessed Jesus drew to his tragical exit, the smaller was the number of the disciples who attended him. When he ate the Paschal Lamb with his disciples, they were all present. When he went to the garden of Gethsemane, one had already

strayed behind, namely, Judas. When he was come to the garden, he took only three of them to go farther in with him, and left the other eight near the entrance of the garden. When he was bound and apprehended, he found himself quite alone, as a shepherd deserted by his sheep. When he was interrogated in the High Priest's palace, Peter again made his appearance ; but returned to his home, loaded with more disgrace than he had brought out with him. John was the only disciple who appeared under the cross of Christ, during his bitter passion. This desertion aggravated the sufferings of our blessed Lord, but at the same time imparted an heroic dignity to his passion ; for by this means, the honour of the victory obtained over death belongs to Him only ; not one of his disciples being at hand to assist or support him. However, though he was deserted by all, he was not alone ; for his Father was with him. (John xvi. 32.) Our blessed Saviour now experienced, how it is with persons who are deserted and forsaken by their dearest friends ; and therefore, he will never neglect or forsake us : And if from extremity of trouble, and severity of persecutions, we unhappily forsake him ; yet is he faithful, and, upon our repentance, will be our unerring guide, through the dreary valley of the shadow of death, (Psalm xxiii. 4.) when we shall find ourselves alone, and deserted by all our best, sincerest friends.

II. But St. Mark farther mentions the flight of a certain young man.

1. The person who fled was a young man. This affrighted youth is expressly distinguished from the disciples of our Lord, and therefore it is not probable that he was one of the twelve ; for the disciples had left their Master, and, whereas, this young man, for sometime after, followed our blessed Lord. He was probably a young man, who lived in some village near Gethsemane, through which the blessed Jesus

was hurried away ; and being awakened out of sleep by the noise of the multitude, he was inclined to see what was the cause of such a tumult.

2. The apparel of the young man who fled is described. He had a linen cloth, or a robe of fine linen, cast about his naked body. This person appears to have risen from his bed, being awakened by the blaze of the torches and the bustle of the croud, and in a hurry throws about him a kind of loose garment to go and see what was doing. When he understood, that it was Jesus of Nazareth that had been taken, he followed some paces to see whither the multitude would carry him.

3. The occasion also of his flight is indicated in these words, 'The young men laid hold on him ; by the young men are here understood, either the Roman soldiers (who were so called among that nation,) or some other young men or servants, that were among the croud. These persons suspected the young man to be one of our Saviour's disciples, and possibly apprehended that he might raise a disturbance in the streets of Jerusalem, and stir up the people to rescue Jesus out of the hands of his enemies. On this account they thought it advisable to lay hold on him, in order to prevent any further mischief.

4. The manner of this young man's flight. He was frightened at being seized, so that he left the linen cloth by which they held him, and ran away from them naked ; and then, after this narrow escape, he returned to his bed, from which his curiosity had led him. The design of this narrative is to shew how inveterate the enemies of our Lord were, not sparing any one of whom they had the least suspicion that he was a disciple of Christ ; and likewise as a proof, that it was not to be imputed to the lenity of the soldiers, but to Christ's command, viz. 'Let these go their way,' that they did not also seize the

disciples, or pursue them when they fled. Hence we may learn,

That two persons may often commit the same fault ; and yet one may be much more criminal than the other. The external action here was the same : The disciples fled ; the young man did the like. Nevertheless, the flight of the former was far more culpable than that of the latter. For, first, as the apostles had received so many benefits from Christ, there was a greater obligation on them to live and die with him. Secondly, They had before very solemnly and earnestly protested, that they would not forsake their Lord and Master ; which we do not find that this young man had done. Thirdly, They had before been warned of their desertion in the garden ; whereas the young man came into this danger quite unprepared. Fourthly, Christ had given them a protection by his speech to the multitude ; but the young man had none. Lastly, The soldiers laid hold of this youth before he ran away ; but the disciples fled of their own accord.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and loving Saviour, praised be thy name for all thine external sufferings, which, in and near the garden of Gethsemane, thou wert pleased to endure for our sake. Let us not forget at what an inestimable price our redemption was procured, that we may set the higher value on our immortal souls. May every painful circumstance of thy sufferings be deeply impressed on our minds ; and may thy Holy Spirit enlighten, support, and strengthen us, that we may courageously follow thee in all sufferings, and not be ashamed of the distinguished badge of thy holy religion. To thee, the victorious captain of our salvation, who art perfected and glorified by sufferings, be ascribed unfeigned thanks and endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

ON THE
SUFFERINGS
OF
CHRIST

BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT OF THE JEWS.

The accounts given by the four Evangelists, (Matt. xxvi. 57, 75. Mark xiv. 53, 72. Luke xxii. 54, 71. John xviii. 13, 27.) connected and harmonised.

‘ AND they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas who was the High Priest the same year. Now Caiaphas was he, who gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And they led Jesus away to Caiaphas the High Priest, where the Scribes and Elders were assembled.

‘ Simon Peter followed Jesus afar off, so did another disciple, to the palace of the High Priest. That disciple was known unto the High Priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the High Priest.— But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple who was known to the High Priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals, for it was cold; and they warmed themselves: And Peter went in and sat down, among the servants, and warmed himself at the fire, that he might see the end. Then the damsel that kept the High Priest’s door beheld Peter,

as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, 'Thou also was with Jesus of Nazareth the Galilean. Art thou not one of this man's disciples? But he denied it before them all, saying, Woman, I am not, I know him not; neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

'The High Priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask them who heard me, what I have said unto them: Behold they know what I have said.

'And when Jesus had thus spoken, one of the officers, who stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of the hand, saying, Answerest thou the High Priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? (Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest.)

'And a little while after, as Peter was gone out to the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. Then one said unto him, Art thou not one of his disciples? But Peter again denied with an oath, Man, I am not; I know not the man. And after a while, about the space of one hour, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him; for he is a Galilean. Then they that stood by came up, and said to Peter, Surely, thou also art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto, and bewrayeth thee. One of the servants of the High Priest (being his kinsman whose ear Peter had cut off,) saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? But Peter began to curse and to swear, and again denied it, and said,

Man, I know not what thou sayest : I know not this man of whom thou speakest.

‘ And immediately, while Peter yet spake, the cock crew a second time. And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter : and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

‘ Now the chief Priests and Elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death ; but found none. Yea, though many bear false witness against him, their testimony agreed not together. At the last came two false witnesses and bare false testimony against him, saying, We heard him say, I am able to [I will] destroy this temple of God that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. Then the High Priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing ? what is it that these witness against thee ? But Jesus held his peace, and answered nothing.

‘ Again the High Priest asked Jesus, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ? I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God : Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said ; I am. Nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

‘ Then the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, he has spoken blasphemy, what farther need have we of witnesses ? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye ? They all condemned him, and answered and said, He is guilty of death.

‘ Then some began to spit on him, and they did spit in his face. And the servants and the men who held Jesus, mocked him, smote him, and buffeted

him. And they blind-folded him, and struck him on the face ; and asked him, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee ? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

‘ And straitway in the morning, as soon as it was day, the chief Priests, the Elders of the people, and the Scribes, came together, and led him into their council. And they said, Art thou the Christ ? tell us. And he said unto them, if I tell you, ye will not believe ; and if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God ? and he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any farther witness ? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.’

PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL Saviour, whose merits are infinite ! as we are now going to consider another part of the history of thy sufferings, we humbly pray thee to grant us the assistance of thy good spirit ; not only to enlighten our understanding, but also powerfully to incline our wills, that we may, from the heart, be obedient to all those precious truths which we shall learn from this history. Impart a particular blessing to each consideration, to the praise of thine infinite love, which moved thee to suffer the most painful and ignominious death for our sake. Amen.

CONSIDERATION I.

THE LORD JESUS BROUGHT BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT OF THE JEWS.

‘AND they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas who was High Priest that same year. Now Caiaphas was he, who gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And they led Jesus away to Caiaphas the High Priest, where the Scribes and Elders were assembled.’ (Matt. xxvi. 57. Mark xiv. 53. Luke xxii. 54. John xviii. 13, 14.

In these words we have an account of the bringing of our blessed Lord before the spiritual court of the Jews. We find that he was brought,

First, Before Annas, one of the chief Priests.

Secondly, Before Caiaphas, the High Priest.

I. That Christ was first brought before Annas, we are informed by these words, ‘And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him to Annas, &c.’ Here are mentioned, first, the persons who led or brought our blessed Saviour; and, secondly, the person before whom he is brought.

First, The persons who brought him thither are not expressly specified in the words which we have recited above; but they are only mentioned in these general terms, ‘they that had laid hold on Jesus.’ If we would particularly learn who they were, we shall find them recounted as follows by St. John: ‘Then the Band, and the Captain, and officers of the Jews, took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first.’ (John xviii. 12, 13.) Hence we see that they were Jews and Gentiles, who, actuated by the spirit of murder, had given themselves up as

wretched instruments to deliver up the Lamb of God to the bloody tribunal of the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem. The party of Roman soldiers, which, at the time of the high festivals, were to prevent any tumult or insurrection at Jerusalem, and likewise their captain or commander, were Heathens. The officers of the Jews, *i. e.* the officers of the Sanhedrim, and other domestics of the chief Priests and Elders, were Israelites by birth. Both Jews and Gentiles had laid hands on Christ, the anointed of the Lord, and treated him with inhuman barbarity in the garden; and both were likewise eagerly engaged in hurrying him to the place, where the unjust sentence of death was to be passed upon him.

But these miscreants not only 'laid hold on our blessed Lord; but also led him away.' The former action is thus described by St. Matthew, 'They that had laid fast hold on Jesus,' as the original denotes: for the traitor Judas, had given them these instructions, 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he, take him, [or hold him fast,] and carry him away safely. (Mark xiv. 44.) All that Judas had promised to do, in return for the thirty pieces of silver, was to deliver Jesus into their hands; as for any farther proceedings, he left all to them. Now, if it should happen, that Jesus should escape by the way, as he had before, more than once, passed through the midst of his enemies unmolested, or that some of his adherents should rescue him out of their hands; Judas was by no means to be answerable in either case, nor to return any part of the money. On this account, the Pagan soldiers and Jewish officers used all possible precaution, and held fast the Lord Jesus, that he might not again, as it were, slip out of their hands.

The other action attributed to these persons, is leading him away. 'They that had laid hold on Jesus, led him away.' Our blessed Lord, after eating the paschal lamb with his disciples at Jerusalem, went

out of the city, over the brook Kedron, and passing through the valley of Jehosaphat, came to the Mount of Olives; where, after an agonizing conflict with everlasting death, he was delivered into the hands of his enemies by the treachery of his disciple Judas. But now, he was again led from Gathsemane into the city. Some are of opinion, that the multitude, instead of going the direct way with him took a circuit by the Sheep-gate. Through this gate, the sheep which were designed for sacrifices, and kept in the adjacent pastures were brought into the city, in order to be sacrificed in the temple, which stood opposite to this gate. By this same way, the true Lamb of God, which was to be offered up for the sins of the whole world, was also led into the city, and brought before the priests, whose province it was to determine whether the beasts that were brought thither, were fit to be sacrificed or not. The multitude, no doubt, had quite another view in dragging him into the city, bound as a thief and murderer, by that very gate through which he had, but a few days before, made his public entry amidst the joyful acclamations of the people. By this circumstance, they intended a greater insult on our blessed Saviour, viz. that the honours, which the well-meaning populace had designed him, might be turned into ignomy and disgrace.

Secondly, The persons, before whom our blessed Lord was brought, are described both by their names, their relation, and office.

The name of one of the persons is Annas. 'They led him away to Annas first.' Mention also is made of this name in St. Luke, (Luke iii. 2.) and in the Acts of the Apostles, (Acts iv. 6.) in both which places this impious man is stiled High Priest: for he had once been invested with that office, but afterwards, according to the custom of those times, deposed. This Annas, whom the Jewish historian Josephus calls Ananus, was a person of great impor-

tance at Jerusalem ; for he had not only been High Priest himself for several years, but had five sons who were all successively likewise advanced to that high dignity ; to which also he now saw even his son-in-law, Caiaphas, promoted. This was a very singular good fortune, to which few of his cotemporaries could lay claim.

But the particular circumstance by which he is here described is, that he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who had married his daughter. This, indeed, seems to have been the real motive for bringing the Lord Jesus first to Annas's house. Though possibly it stood in a street, through which our blessed Lord was to be carried in his way to Caiaphas's palace, yet, they would hardly have gone first into Annas's house, had he not been father-in-law to the High Priest for that year ; and as he was more advanced in years, and more crafty and full of stratagem, he had probably instructed his son-in-law in forming the most cruel devices against Jesus, and prompted him to put them in execution. Now, these plots having, in their opinion, so fortunately succeeded ; they were for paying a compliment to this reverend conspirator, by carrying before him first the blameless Lamb which was led to the slaughter, that he might feast his eyes with the sight, and enjoy the malicious pleasure, which the apprehending of the blessed Jesus gave to the Jewish priests.

What passed in Annas's house, with regard to our blessed Lord, the Evangelists do not specify. Some, indeed, are of opinion, that he was here interrogated, and denied by Peter for the first time, and struck on the face by an officer ; because St. John, after relating these three particulars, concludes this part of the narrative with these words, ' And Annas sent him bound to the High Priest, Caiaphas.' (Chap. xviii.) But it was not in Annas's house where these things happened ; for these words ought to be included in a

parenthesis.* Hence it appears, that the Lord Jesus was questioned concerning his doctrine, in Caiaphas's house, and was there struck by a brutal officer; an insolence contrary to all the dictates of Justice and humanity, as the blessed Jesus then stood bound before the tribunal; for Annas had sent him bound to his son-in-law, Caiaphas. However, though Christ underwent no examination, with regard to his doctrine, &c. in Annas's house; yet we may reasonably suppose, that the domestics and the multitude, who brought him bound thither, were not wanting in offering insults to his sacred person: And we may further conclude, that the Lord Jesus was reproached in the most virulent manner, by this haughty and imperious pontiff.

Thus was our blessed Lord brought first before Annas, the high priest: From this circumstance, before we proceed further, we shall draw the following inferences.

1. The children of darkness, in many things, shew themselves wiser than the children of light. How careful were the soldiers and officers of the Jews to hold fast the Lord Jesus, and safely lead him away, after he had fallen into their hands? How willing likewise was the deposed High Priest, Annas, to renounce his sleep, in which aged persons are apt to indulge themselves, and to sit up till midnight, only to enjoy the malicious satisfaction of seeing Jesus of Nazareth secured and bound? Do we use such diligence to become partakers of our blessed Saviour? And when we are blessed with this divine guest, where are they that say with Jacob, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me?' (Gen. xxxii. 26.) Where are they to be found, who willingly forego their ease, and their sleep, when an opportunity offers of

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* The English translator renders this verse, very properly, 'Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high Priest.'
W.

shewing kindness to Christ in his distressed members, and who, with David, rise up at midnight to praise the Lord 'for his righteous judgments?' (Psalm cxix. 62.) Is it not true, that we are surpassed by these children of darkness? as they were much more active and diligent to injure and offend our blessed Lord, than we are to render ourselves acceptable to him.

2. The many weary steps of the blessed Jesus, are also to be reckoned among his meritorious sufferings. Our blessed Saviour had six weary and painful walks to go, antecedently to his passion. 1. From the garden of Gethsemane to the house of Annas, the High Priest's father-in-law, 2. From Annas to Caiaphas, 3. From Caiaphas to Pilate, 4. From Pilate to Herod, 5. From Herod again to Pilate, 6. From Pilate's seat of judgment to Mount Golgotha. Oh, how many weary steps did our Saviour tread, during this first ignominious walk! He was hurried along in the dead of night, by a tedious, indirect, and rugged way, from the Mount of Olives into the city. Disgrace and pain were here his inseparable companions. Shame marched before him, as he was led bound like a public malefactor, a disturber of the peace, and an heretic; and pain, like a hideous phantom, followed his weary footsteps. His sinless soul was sensibly touched by the rudest sarcasms, the most taunting reflections, and the bitterest imprecations and blasphemies, which were poured out like a torrent, by the outrageous multitude. His tender body, which, but a few hours before, had been extremely weakened by his agony and bloody sweat, was barbarously handled, bruised, and spurned, by the inhuman soldiers; so that the Messiah's complaint in the Psalms, 'They thrust sore at me, that I might fall; but the Lord helped me,' (Psalm cxviii. 13.) was here literally fulfilled. The inveterate malice of his enemies was such, that even on Mount Golgotha, at the con-

cluding scene of this dismal tragedy, they did not cease to imbitter his death with all kind of mockeries, and cruel tortures : Hence it may easily be conceived, how great their rage and barbarity must have been at the beginning, when they had just got our blessed Lord in their merciless hands. These painful walks, the Son of God would never have undergone, had not our feet departed from the way of God's commandments, and wandered in the devious paths of destruction. How many thousand sinful walks, especially in the night-time, are taken by the children of Satan, who are engaged in adultery, thefts, murder, drunkenness, and other works of darkness. Oh, that every one would well examine into the nature of his goings, and the secret ways wherein he has walked ! Oh, that every one, who hitherto has walked in wicked and destructive paths, may resolve, in honour to his suffering Saviour, to turn his devious steps to the way of peace ; in his merits to seek the forgiveness of his sinful steps ; and henceforth give himself up to the guidance and direction of his good spirit.

3. The suffering Redeemer has, in his sacred person, sanctified the abusive treatment, which his suffering members often meet with. Christ was here made a spectacle, and was led away to Annas, that this crafty and imperious pontiff might have the malicious pleasure of seeing him bound like a felon. This has likewise been often the case with his suffering members ; so that they may say with St. Paul, ' We are made a spectacle to the world.' (1 Cor. iv. 9.) It is, however, a great and unspeakable comfort to Christian martyrs, when they are made a show of, carried about, as it were, in triumph, and brought before unjust and relentless judges, through multitudes of the insulting populace, for the truth's sake, to consider, that such sufferings are sanctified by the

adorable Son of God, who trod the thorny path before them.

4. The natural ties of consanguinity are often altered into bands of wickedness. Annas, being father-in-law to Caiaphas, was willing to indulge him with the impious satisfaction of seeing the blessed Jesus, whose innocence was so conspicuous, bound like a malefactor.

II. The person before whom our blessed Saviour was brought in the next place, was Caiaphas, the High Priest, and other persons who were present with him.

The chief person is here, first, pointed out by his name, Caiaphas or Caiphas, who was also called Joseph; and, as we have already observed, was son-in-law to Annas, having married his daughter.

Secondly, He is described by his office, 'who was the High Priest that same year.' It was not the first year of Caiaphas's pontificate, he having some years before raised himself into that high office, by the favour of the Roman governor; but this circumstance, that he 'was the High Priest that same year,' is added by reason of the great irregularities practised at that time, with regard to the high priesthood. It seldom happened in that age, that any one held this office until death, according to the divine institution; but the family of Herod, and the Roman governors, used to sell it to the highest bidder; or, from other indirect motives, took it away from one, and bestowed it on another. In the space of one century, which intervened from the reign of Herod to the destruction of Jerusalem, seven and twenty high priests were deposed, out of twenty-eight, some of whom scarce bore the dignity a year, as may be seen in Josephus's Antiquities. For the nearer the Levitical priesthood in the house of Aaron drew to its abolition, the shorter was the duration of that dignity in one person. In the year of our Saviour's passion, Caiaphas

phas was still High Priest, and continued such for several years after, until Vitellius, the Roman governor, substituted in his room, Jonathan, the Son of Annas. But how unreasonable does it appear to human comprehension, that the true High Priest over the House of God, whom God had appointed and confirmed with an oath, should here be obliged to stand as a prisoner in bonds before the Jewish High Priest, whose office was only a shadow of the real dignity, and importance of his priesthood? However, it was fitting, that on account of their hypocrisy, these false shepherds of Israel should at last be 'cut off from the tabernacles of Jacob,' (Mal. ii. 12.) since the soul of the Lord 'loathed them, and their soul also abhorred him.' (Zach. xi. 8.)

Thirdly, Caiaphas is described by a very particular circumstance; for St. John observes that it was he who had suggested to the Jews, 'that it was expedient, that one man should die for the people.' (John xviii. 14.) By these words we are referred to the eleventh chapter of the same Evangelist. Our blessed Lord having raised Lazarus from the dead, by which miracle great numbers were induced to believe on the name of Jesus; the High Priest and Scribes met, and held a consultation in order to put a stop to this growing evil, which threatened the Jewish church. 'What do we? said they, (John xi. 47, &c.) for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' Upon this, Caiaphas the High Priest delivered his sentiments in the following words: 'Ye know nothing at all, nor consider, that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' Thus St. John here puts us in mind again of the counsel that Caiaphas had given the Jews on a former occasion, (and by that means shews his disposition towards

our blessed Saviour,) which was full of bitter enmity and flagrant injustice. For the meaning of his words seems to be this: "Supposing this Jesus of Nazareth to be an innocent person; yet is it better, for once, to set aside the rules of justice and equity, and make a sacrifice of them to the public welfare, than that the Jewish nation should be deprived of its liberty; for it is to be apprehended, that the Romans will avail themselves of the disturbances that are like to arise from this man's doctrines, and come and take away both our place and nation." All this he spoke with the greatest acrimony, so as even to reproach the priests, &c. his own colleagues, with their weakness and want of penetration, because they did not see the necessity of putting Jesus of Nazareth to death at all events. 'Ye know nothing at all,' As if he had said, "When imminent danger hangs over our heads, we must not stand consulting with conscience, but bring the affair to a speedy conclusion, that we may save ourselves and the whole nation from impending ruin." Thus Caiaphas is represented to us, by the beloved disciple, as a person of a hardened conscience, full of hatred and malice against the sacred person of the Lord Jesus, and of a consummate effrontery. It was, probably, matter of great joy to him that this iniquitous and bloody advice against Jesus of Nazareth was carried into execution during his pontificate. Nay, it may be presumed he received many congratulations on so glorious an event. This is the holy man, cried the Jews, who, by his indefatigable zeal, delivered our church from that vile heretic and incendiary, and saved it from utter destruction. Thus the undiscerning multitude look upon that as their happiness, which is their greatest misfortune. 'The ease of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.' (Prov. i. 32.) Such is the character of the chief person in the assembly before which our blessed Lord was brought.

The rest of the assistants who composed the council are described in the following words : ' The chief Priests and Elders of the people, and the Scribes came together.' Hence it appears that most of the members of the Sanhedrim seem to have been present here, in order to consult on the most proper means to bring Jesus of Nazareth to a trial. This was a very extraordinary meeting, as it was not customary in cases where life was concerned to hold a sessions in the night time; and it was, at the same time, a very august assembly. The chief Priests, *i. e.* persons descended from several High Priests, some of whom had also formerly bore that office, were persons in high esteem and veneration on account of their high birth; the elders were respectable for their great authority among the people, and the Scribes for their erudition and skill in explaining the Jewish law. However, the prince of darkness was the president of this court; so that justice was little to be expected here. It was an assembly, of which Jacob would have said, as he did of Simeon and Levi, the ancestors of this unjust judge, ' O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly mine honour be not thou united! cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath for it was cruel. (Gen. xlix. 6, 7.)

It was not without the Divine decree, that the Son of God was now brought before this wicked and perverse generation. Here Shiloh was to make his appearance at a time whilst the Lawgiver was still among the Jews. (Gen. xlix. 10.) Here the true Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world was to be brought unto the priest. (Lev. xvii. 5.) Here the Foundation and Corner-stone, which God was to lay in Sion, was to be shewn to the builders, and by them to be despised and rejected. (Psalm cxxiii. 22. Acts iv. 11.) Here he that is to be the Supreme Judge of all mankind was to stand among the mighty

in the Jewish congregation, (Psalm lxxxii. 1.) and with his eyes to behold their iniquity. (Zach. ix. 8.) Here he who was made under the law was brought before judges sitting in Moses's chair, that he might hereafter with the greater right 'spoil principalities magistracies, and powers, and make an open shew of them, triumphing over them.' (Col. ii. 15.) This is the counsel of the all-wise God, which we are to admire in permitting Christ thus to be brought before the spiritual court of the Jews: And we may well say with the prophet, 'the Lord is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.' (Isaiah xxviii. 29.) But we shall make some observations on this circumstance in our Saviour's sufferings.

1. Christians are still frequently sacrificed, as it is pretended, to the public tranquillity: This is the way of the world: they first raise disturbances and commotions about the doctrines of Christianity, and afterwards pretend that true Christians are such a refractory, turbulent set of men, that it is absolutely necessary for the public welfare to make a sacrifice of them, either by depriving them of their employments, or putting them to death. These stratagems of the world were also conspicuous in the sufferings of our blessed Saviour: An useful lesson to the children of God, that they may not be offended, if it should happen to be their case, that the public peace and tranquillity should be judged to depend on their being banished or put to death.

2. Those minds which are bold, enterprising, and void of shame, are satan's fittest tools. Of this we have an instance in Caiaphas, who had obtained to the highest pitch of shameless audacity: No other person was fitter for satan's purpose, when he designed to wound the heel of the woman's blessed seed.—Therefore a man has little reason to account it a happiness to be of a forward, rash, and shameless disposition; so that he can undertake the most enormous

crimes, and carry into execution such iniquitous designs, as others, of a tender conscience, will not be concerned in. On the contrary, such an impious boldness is a sign of a seared conscience. These are the engines which the devil and antichrist use to the greatest advantage, in their most destructive attempts on the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But their reward will be according to their work.

3. He, who considers only the external dignity of the enemies of Christ, may easily be dazzled and seduced by their appearance. We have seen what great personages were assembled together in the house of Caiaphas the High Priest; yet these satan made use of, as his instruments to condemn the innocent Son of God to death. In this assembly the most aged and refined politicians, and the profoundest scholars, notwithstanding all their wisdom, knew not God; but rejected and 'crucified the Lord of glory.' (1. Cor. ii. 7. 8.) Therefore let no one be dazzled by such external advantages as a high character, an eminent post, splendid titles, a reputation of sanctity, and profound learning; qualifications which we often meet with in the enemies of God's cause: but let him pray to God to illuminate his eyes, that he may see through all these thick vapours into the very hearts of the enemies of Christ, which are filled with hatred, envy, malice, and bloody devices; and then, whatever be the external advantages of such men, he will never suffer himself to be blinded or seduced by them.

4. It is to Christ's standing before the tribunal of men that we owe our discharge from the just tribunal of God. We had transgressed the first and second table of the divine law; and for that violation, were to have been brought before the awful tribunal of God, and there condemned. But our surety, who hath perfectly fulfilled both tables, here condescends to be brought before the spiritual court, which takes

cognizance of the breach of the first table; and afterwards before the civil tribunal, whose province it was to punish sins against the second; and before both tribunals to be falsely accused, and unjustly sentenced to die, that we, by his innocence, may be freed from the just accusation of the law. Therefore whoever with true penitence acknowledges his transgressions of God's commandments, though he be as it were accused in the spiritual court of his own conscience, and condemned by the divine law as a malefactor, if he humbly prays unto the Lord not to enter into strict judgment with his servant, and by a lively faith lays hold of the merit of his spotless Redeemer, who stood as a malefactor before an inexorable tribunal, 'he shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' (John v. 24.) However, this exemption from judgment and condemnation, which was purchased at so dear a rate by the blessed Jesus, is of no benefit to the impenitent and unconverted. Such a one must be brought before the Supreme tribunal, and sentenced to death with the strictest justice. Happy is it for us, when we judge ourselves; for then the Lord will not visit us with his sore and alarming judgments.

THE PRAYER.

O THOU faithful and loving Saviour! we thank thee for thy unparalleled condescension in suffering thyself to be brought before an earthly tribunal, to deliver us from judgment before the tribunal of heaven. Praised be thy name, who hast passed through every circumstance of contempt and ill usage, and paved the way for thy poor distressed members, that in following thee they may, without murmuring, get over every stumbling block and stone of offence. O blessed Jesus! keep our hearts, we pray thee, from taking any offence at thee, or thy Cross; and give us grace, that from thy sufferings before this relentless

tribunal, we may derive sufficient strength to our souls, that we may hold out in all persecutions, and continue faithful unto thee till death. Grant this for the sake of thy meritorious sufferings. Amen.



CONSIDERATION II.

THE FIRST FALL OF PETER THE APOSTLE.

‘SIMON Peter followed Jesus afar off, and so did another disciple, to the palace of the High Priest. That other disciple was known unto the High Priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the High Priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple who was known to the High Priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals, for it was cold; and they warmed themselves: And Peter went in, and sat down among the servants, and warmed himself at the fire, that he might see the end. Then the damsel who kept the door of the High Priest, beheld Peter, as he warmed himself and sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth the Galilean. Art thou not one of this man’s disciples? But he denied it before them all, saying, Woman, I am not; I know him not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went into the porch; and the cock crew.’ (Matt. xxvi. 58, 69, 70. Mark xiv. 54, 66—68. Luke xxii. 54—57. John xviii. 15—18.)

In these words we have an account of Peter’s first fall, in which is related,

First, the occasion of it.

Secondly, the grievous fall itself.

I. This account of the occasion of Peter’s fall

mentions, first, the remote cause of it ; and secondly, the nearer or immediate cause.

First, As to the remote cause of his fall, two circumstances prepared the way for this heinous sin, namely, the presumptuous following of Christ ; and his indiscreetly entering into the High Priest's palace.

The first remote cause then, was his presumptuous following of Christ : How ! would one think, that the following our blessed Lord should so far mislead a man as to deny Christ ? It was even so. ' Simon Peter followed Jesus afar off, and so did another disciple, to the High Priest's palace.

He who followed Jesus was Simon Peter, the oldest of all our Saviour's disciples. He is here distinguished from all the rest of the disciples. Of the others it is said, ' Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.' (Matt. xxvi. 56.) Peter, indeed, in the first surprise, had also run away ; but observing that nobody pursued him, and recollecting his promise, viz, ' Lord, why cannot I follow thee now ? I will lay down my life for thy sake ; (John xiii. 37.) though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,' (Matt. xxvi. 33.) he turned back, and followed Christ at a distance. His following the Lord Jesus is certainly a good and commendable action ; and Peter had given the first proof of his love to the blessed Jesus, when, as soon as Christ said, ' Follow me !' he forsook all, and commenced his disciple. And even when he now followed his Master, all the love he bore to the Lord Jesus was not extinguished in his heart. But this love was mixed with many imperfection, so that Peter in following Christ at this juncture fell into several sins. He first sinned against God's providence, because he put it, as it were, to the test, whether it would protect and preserve him when he obstinately plunged himself into danger ? He sinned against his Master, by presumptuously acting contrary to what Jesus had

expressly told him, 'Whither I go thou canst not follow me now;' (John xiii. 36.) which words of Christ he by this action would confute, and shew that what his Master had declared impossible, he could nevertheless perform. Lastly, he trespassed against his fellow-disciples, by leaving their society, and thrusting himself among the enemies of Christ; nay, Peter, in his heart, exalted himself above all of them, and designed to disgrace them by his resolution in following his Lord and Master. These circumstances serve to shew, that Peter was not to be commended for following Christ at this juncture.

His companion, in following his master at this time, was another disciple. By that other disciple some commentators understand St. John; but there is little probability that that disciple was so well known in the High Priest's house. Others suppose that other disciple to have been Judas the traitor. He, indeed, might have been very well known in the High Priest's house; but it is hardly probable that Peter would have associated with him, unless he had very artfully dissembled his villainy, and induced Peter to believe, that he was entirely innocent as to Christ's being taken in the garden; and that by the kiss he meant only to give his Master an intimation to secure himself against his enemies, who were coming on, and to make all possible haste out of the garden. But the most probable conjecture is, that this was not one of the twelve apostles, but some reputable inhabitant of Jerusalem, who was in his heart secretly convinced of the truth of our Saviour's doctrine; but for fear of the excommunication with which the Sanhedrim had threatened all that should profess the doctrine of Christ, concealed his sentiments, and, on account of some affairs he had to transact in the High Priest's house, was known to his domestics. Oh, how is the number of the disciples and followers of the blessed Jesus now decreased! how few attend him at this

critical time; whereas the people attended him by thousands, and followed him into the most solitary deserts before. But Peter and another disciple were all that now followed Christ.

The manner of Peter's following our blessed Lord is described in these words, 'Peter followed Jesus afar off.' His throbbing heart struggled between love and fear. A kind of spurious love of Christ drew him nearer, and a well grounded fear induced him to draw back again. Thus he lagged behind, lurking afar off in the dark, with a wounded conscience; having very heinously offended, by his temerity and confidence, in his preceding discourse with his Lord and Master. Here he exhibits the condition of us all, as described by the prophet: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.' (Isaiah liii. 6.)

Lastly, the place to which Peter followed his Christ, was the High Priest's house; for being desirous of seeing how it would go with his master, he drew near the place where the blessed Jesus had been carried, after he had been bound.

The second remote occasion of Peter's fall, was his entering into the High Priest's palace. Here we may observe what passed before; and likewise what happened in the palace.

The preceding circumstance was, that the other secret disciple of Christ was admitted into the court among those who brought Jesus thither. For being known to the High Priest's domestics, he got admission, as he was little suspected of being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence it is very probable, that this person, whoever he was, had carefully concealed his favourable opinion of the doctrines of Jesus Christ; otherwise he would have been strictly forbid to enter into the High Priest's house. He could therefore by no other means gain admittance there, but by putting on the mask of hypocrisy. Had he

been so hard pressed as Peter was, he would undoubtedly have denied Christ with the same peremptory assurance. But the Father of mercies had compassion on his weakness, and would not suffer him to be tempted above what he was able to bear; especially as so much could not be required from him, as from Peter, who had received more grace, and been forewarned of his danger. In the mean time, while this disciple was in the palace, Peter was obliged to stand without at the door. It may be supposed that the door of the house was carefully guarded, as there was such a multitude of people at that time at Jerusalem on account of the festival, lest a tumult should arise, and some of his followers should force their way into the palace, and rescue Jesus out of the hands of his enemies. Now it behoved Peter to fall upon his knees, and intreat God that he might not fall into temptation. But as he neglected this precaution, and too much confided in himself; as he had already proceeded beyond the limits of the safe-conduct which the Lord Jesus had procured him, and even beyond the intention of his master, he is obliged at last to purchase wisdom by sad experience.

What happened to Peter in the palace is described in the following words: 'Then went out that other disciple, who was known to the High Priest, and spake to her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.' This disciple cannot be supposed to have had any ill intention, and might imagine that he conferred a favour on Peter, by procuring him admission into the High Priest's palace. Peter likewise probably might think it a great happiness that the young man got him admitted into the palace; whereas it proved his greatest misfortune. From this remote cause of Peter's first fall, before we proceed to consider the immediate cause of it; we shall deduce the following truths:

1. A good inclination, if it be not directed and guided by the Word of God, is very deceitful and dangerous. Peter thought he acted a laudable part in following the Lord Jesus afar off, and venturing into the High Priest's palace. But as in this his good intention he paid no regard to the word of Christ, viz. 'Thou canst not follow me now,' it proved a most dangerous snare to him. The other disciple had also a friendly intention in procuring Peter admittance into the palace; and yet he was a concurring cause of Peter's falling into the greatest misfortune. This is the case of many thousands. If they have a good intention in any particular action, you can never convince them that they act amiss, though they cannot produce any command, or promise, of God, to warrant their proceeding; nay, they will not be advised until their fall unhappily convinces them of their temerity and want of due reflection. Good intentions are the sources of all the idolatrous worship, and all the false and hypocritical devotions, practised in the church of Rome. On this occasion therefore, we must consider that our good intentions are mere blind impulses, when they are not conducted by the superior light of God's will, manifested in his word, but rather run counter to it; and that the very best intention can never justify an action that is essentially evil.

2. An acquaintance with rich and great personages, who are enemies to goodness and virtue, is a dangerous snare to weak and unsettled minds. It is very probable, that the intimacy of this secret disciple of Christ in the family of the impious High Priest was an extreme detriment to his spiritual welfare, restraining him from a sincere faith in Christ, and a bold profession of his heavenly doctrine. He was unwilling to lose the acquaintance he had contracted in the palace, which was attended with many temporal advantages; so that he became a wretched hypocrite, and saw

himself obliged, on this account, to disguise the conviction he had of the truth of our Saviour's doctrine. This is still the way of the world. For instance, if a young divine has a powerful patron who opposes all goodness, it may prove a dangerous snare to him; since, for fear of losing his favour, or forfeiting the preferment he is in expectation of, he not only proves an unfaithful steward of the grace he has received; but to ingratiate himself farther with his patron, depreciates true piety and virtue. Fixed and undaunted minds may profit by an acquaintance with the great and powerful, and contribute to the advancement of Christ's kingdom; but weak and timorous souls are much more likely to be seduced by it to dissimulation and hypocrisy. We ought not therefore to force ourselves into such an acquaintance; but when, without our own seeking, we are introduced to the rich and great by the secret guidance of God; we must use the opportunity with fear and trembling, and exert a constant vigilance over the motions of our souls. A true Christian must fortify himself with a firm resolution rather to draw on himself the contempt and hatred of all the world, than presumptuously offend an all-powerful God, deny his sacred truths, and violate his own conscience. But if we offer to prevaricate: if we would fain be the disciples of Christ, and also preserve the esteem and favour of the world; the infallible consequence will be, that we shall be ensnared by it into dissimulation and hypocrisy.

Secondly, As to the more immediate cause of Peter's first fall, two circumstances concurred to draw him into this snare, namely, his being in company with the servants and officers; and the speech of the damsel who kept the door.

Peter's being in company with the officers, &c. is mentioned in these words: 'And the servants and officers stood there, and had made a fire of coals, for

it was cold ; and they warmed themselves.' This happened in the night-time, in the month of March, when the nights are pretty sharp in Palestine, on account of the great dews which usually fall there at that time of the year. On this account, the officers and servants, who had brought Jesus from the Mount of Olives into the city, made a coal-fire in the hall of the palace, to warm themselves ; and probably their discourse turned on Jesus, whom they had just apprehended. Peter also went, and sat among the servants, and warmed himself by the fire. St. John says he stood ; but the other Evangelists, that he sat. But this may be easily reconciled, by considering, that a man under extreme perplexity and perturbation of mind sometimes rises up and walks about, then sits down again, continually changing his posture ; so that his outward deportment, as it were, expresses the inward disorder of his mind.

Peter, in thus mingling with the company of officers and servants, might have had several designs in view. One might be to warm himself at the fire ; but as he had been a fisherman, and consequently toiled at his business many cold nights, he must have been enured to the cold ; so that this could not be his principal view, which was, that he might see what would be the end or issue of the affair. He was also desirous of hearing what the servants thought of Jesus, and was curious to know their opinion of the trial, &c. But he had, long before, heard from the mouth of the blessed Jesus himself, how this affair would end ; namely, that he should be delivered up into the hands of the Gentiles ; that they would scourge him, revile him, and put him to death on the cross. This prophecy of Christ had, for a long time, slipped out of Peter's mind ; and therefore, he draws near to see how things would terminate, and crouds amongst the officers and servants, the better to conceal himself, and to pass for one of the multitude who had brought

Jesus thither. Had he stood alone in some corner, he would have been soon suspected. Therefore, he took care, by mixing among the croud, that the trouble his mind laboured under should not in the least be observed, and, we may suppose, was not totally silent; and thus he was persuaded, that he could not be detected. But even by these very means was he betrayed; for by the light of the fire he was the sooner known. Thus it happens, when a man departs from the means which God is pleased to employ for his preservation, that those things often prove the occasion of his fall, by which he thinks to avoid it.

Another immediate, or nearer cause of Peter's grievous sin was the speech of the damsel, who kept the door; of whom it is said, that 'she earnestly looked on Peter;' and also spoke to him. For, as Peter was near the fire, the blaze of light rendered him more conspicuous; so that the damsel, who kept the door, recollected that she had seen his face before, and knew him. She therefore resolved to speak to him; and, according to the accounts given by the Evangelists harmonised, three gradations are to be observed in her words.

First, St. John says, she asked him, 'Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?' From these words, it is easily seen that this maid was far from being a friend to Jesus Christ, as she avoids the mention of his name, contemptuously calling him 'this man.' This is the common custom of the world. When the masters of great families have an aversion to truth and piety, and ridicule and decry the good and virtuous on all occasions, their servants and domestics imitate their ill example. Upon this, probably Peter was silent; and seemed as if he did not hear her, or imagined she spoke to some other person.

Secondly, She looked earnestly on him, and said, according to the accounts of St. Matthew and St.

Mark, ‘And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth;’ or as St. Matthew says, ‘with Jesus of Galilee;’ for Nazareth was a town of Galilee. She calls him a Galilean, by way of contempt; for it was a common proverb among the Jews, that no prophet ariseth out of Galilee. (John vii. 52.) Hence the Roman emperor, Julian the apostate, used also out of contempt to call Jesus Christ the Galilean, and the Christians, Galileans.

Thirdly, The damsel informs the officers and servants of it, saying, according to St. Luke, ‘This man was also with him.’ This we may suppose drew on Peter the eyes of all that were standing about the fire. The only crime with which he was here accused, was this, namely, that he was one of Jesus’s disciples. But this accusation, in such a place, and at such a juncture, was sufficient to bring any one in danger of his life. Peter therefore did not stick at clearing himself from this accusation by a direct lie, that he might escape the danger that threatened him. From these two immediate causes of Peter’s fall, we shall make the following observations :

1. When a person has once departed from the ways of God, every step he takes brings him nearer his fall. Here we may plainly see, how Peter went on step by step into temptation. First he betook himself to flight with the other disciples. Then he should have recollected the words of Christ, viz. ‘Ye shall be scattered, and leave me alone;’ and it is there subjoined by our blessed Lord, addressing himself particularly to Peter, ‘Thou shalt deny me thrice.’ He ought to have considered, that the former part of this prediction was already fulfilled; and how easily might the latter also prove true! But he trusted too much to his own strength; and as he had said, he would go with Jesus to prison and to death, so his temerity prompted him to turn back and follow his master at a distance. He proceeded so far,

as to venture even to the door of the palace, where Christ was to undergo his trial. However, he might still have been safe here, and been informed of the issue of his master's trial. At last he went into the palace; but this was not enough, he even crowded among the servants. All this, Peter imagined to be only the effect of a strong faith; whereas it was in reality nothing but extreme rashness. So proud is frail man, that he will not confess his weakness and irresolution. If he is admonished to beware of keeping ill company, he thinks he is no longer a child, and knows how to govern himself. When he is in such company, he cannot bear to pass for a precise, gloomy, and unsociable person; but joins with the rest in committing a thousand things, which are displeasing to God, and wound his conscience. However, he will be upon his guard against any gross and enormous sins, that he may not cast any blemish on his character, &c. In the mean time, satan, into whose dominion he has wilfully ventured, excites him still farther on, and draws the snare of temptation nearer and nearer; so that at last he proceeds to drunkenness and intemperance, and then to other heinous sins, and scandalous debaucheries. Therefore, let none of us be rash and presumptuous, but humble and diffident. Let none confide too much in himself, but carefully avoid every occasion of sinning. A man cannot promise himself the divine protection, and assistance of the Holy Spirit, if he himself willingly runs into dangers and trials.

2. The disciples of Christ cannot long be concealed among the multitude of the profligate children of this world. Had Peter, like the rest, inveighed against Christ, and ridiculed his doctrines, he would have avoided all suspicion. But as he remained silent, and possibly, was sometimes unable to suppress his sighs, being under such a violent perturbation of mind, he was soon suspected to be one of Jesus's disciples.

Thus it is still with the children of God, when they mingle with the wicked: They are not long undistinguished from those about them. Their deportment, their words and actions are so different from those of the bulk of mankind, that they are soon discovered; and others think it strange, that they do not run with them to the same excess of riot, and profaneness. Therefore, however they may dissemble and conceal themselves, they never remain long undiscovered. God himself will bring them to light, that they may be put to the test, whether they will suffer contempt or ill-treatment for the sake of Christ. Whoever does not think himself strong enough to bear this, cannot be too cautious in avoiding the company of the wicked, and prophane; otherwise it will prove a dangerous snare to him.

3. In times of public persecution, it is accounted the greatest of crimes, to be a disciple of Christ. The damsel did not charge Peter with any criminal action; but his whole fault was, being Jesus's disciple. This was a prelude to what was afterwards practised in the Heathen persecutions. When any one was by them convicted of being a Christian, he was sure to forfeit his life. It was common among the Heathens to observe, that such a person was a worthy man; but then he was a Christian. Such an aversion had the Heathens conceived for this name, that they looked upon those who were distinguished by it, as an execrable set of men. And thus the prediction of Christ was fulfilled, 'They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you for my name's sake.' (Luke xxi. 12, 17.)

II. In the account of Peter's first denial is mentioned, first, the witnesses: 'He denied it before them all,' before the whole croud of servants, &c. who were in the court together; and by this means, gave public offence. Secondly, The words that he spoke; which, according to the harmonised account of the Evangelists, are as follows. 'I am not;' I am

no disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. But that was not all; he farther added, 'I know him not;' I have no acquaintance with the man, and have no manner of connection with him. Nay, 'I know not what thou sayest;' I understand not your meaning. So strongly did Peter dissemble, as if he never had any thing to do with Jesus of Nazareth, and did not in the least care what became of him. At these words of the damsel, he was, as it were, thunder-struck; and, all his boasted resolution disappeared at this one attack. He thought the High Priest's servants would immediately lay hold of him, bind him, and carry him before the council to be tried; who would immediately sentence him to die. Thus he already began to faint, only at the distant appearance of danger.

Here I must beg leave to observe, that the following incident, according to St. Matthew's account of it, seems to be a wise intimation to Peter of what would befall him at the time of our Saviour's sufferings. This remarkable incident is thus related by the Evangelist. (Matt. xiv. 22—23.) 'And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: And when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit: And they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when

he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith! wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.'

Here we may consider,

First, The agitated sea, is an emblem of the tumultuous Jewish populace, who were instigated by their priests and elders, to rage with all possible violence against Jesus and his disciples.

Secondly, The blessed Jesus, during this storm, was absent from his disciples, who were then separated from him, and tossed by the outrageous waves; and he walked on the sea, without being swallowed up by the waters. This clearly represents to us, that our blessed Lord, in the most difficult and violent temptations, never permitted himself to be overcome by the strength of them; but by his confidence, obedience, and love towards his Heavenly Father, remained firm and unmoved, and trod the boisterous surge under his feet; while his poor disciples who, by flight, had separated themselves from him, were driven from one place to another like a ship at the mercy of the waves.

Thirdly, Peter conceited that he had more strength than in reality he was possessed of; for he alone of all the disciples, on seeing Jesus walking on the sea, desired that he might come to him down on the raging deep. Thus the same Peter desired of his Lord and Master, that he might accompany him to prison and to death, and consequently undergo the same severe trials with Christ himself; whereas the blessed Jesus alone was able to go through the conflict.

Fourthly, Christ permitted Peter, on his own request, to walk on the sea and come to him. So the Lord Jesus seems to permit, that Peter alone should follow him afar off into the High Priest's palace,

while the other disciples remained behind ; in order to put him to the proof, whether he could, like his master, walk on the tumultuous waves of trials and temptations.

Fifthly, When Peter first ventured to commit himself to the boisterous waves, they had no power over him ; but when his confidence in Christ began to shake at the rising of a sudden storm, then Peter sunk, and was like to perish. This same Peter, after he had mingled with the tumultuous multitude which foamed and raged, like the troubled ocean, against Christ, was no sooner questioned by a servant maid, but his courage forsook him, and he was brought to the very brink of final destruction ; so that the waves of trial very nearly swallowed him up.

Sixthly, When Peter was in such imminent danger, our blessed Lord was graciously pleased, not only to stretch forth his hand and support him, but lifted him out of the water and secured his goings. In like manner, Christ was moved with tender compassion to Peter in the instance before us, cast a look at him as he was sinking, and by that means moved him to repentance, and confirmed him in his former faith.

Lastly, Peter being thus supported by Christ, walked firmly with him on the water, after the example of his Lord and master. This same Peter, being raised again from his grievous fall, undauntedly preached the gospel of Christ, notwithstanding a variety of persecutions, and even strengthened his brethren. Thus the Lord Jesus, in his gracious wisdom, a whole year before the event, seems, by this incident, to have set before Peter's eyes what would afterwards befall him.

But to return from this digression. Peter, after giving the first proof of his weakness, this beginning of his sinking under his trial, went out into the court, i. e. stole away from the crowd of servants and soldiers to the porch, near the gate which opened out of

the court into the street; and behold, 'the cock crew.' He found this to be a dangerous place; his conscience told him, that he had grievously sinned against his master; and this voice of conscience was confirmed by that of the cock, which by his crowing put him in mind of his master's words, namely, 'This night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.' (Mark xiv. 30.) Hence we may draw the following inferences:

1. The Spirit of God calls sins by quite another name, than what depraved reason gives them. Peter probably thought thus with himself; What right has this maid-servant to ask me, whether I am a disciple of Jesus, or belong to his followers? As she has no authority to question me, I am not obliged to tell her the truth. I have said nothing scandalous, or that tends to defame my master; and what service would it do him, if I should bring myself in danger of my life? As my confession can do him no manner of good, he will not take it ill, that I pretend I do not know him. Thus he little thought that he was guilty of the sin of denying Jesus Christ before men. But the Holy Spirit plainly says, 'He denied him before all.' This denial is placed in opposition to confessing Christ and his religion, and consequently is a heinous sin. For the Son of God has positively said, 'Whosoever confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven: But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven.' (Matt. x. 32, 33.) And indeed, Peter here committed a sin of a very deep dye. He not only told a manifest falsity against his knowledge and conscience, but, in time of distress, 'he made lies his refuge;' (Isaiah xxviii. 15.) whereas he should have relied on the protection of God, and the safe-conduct given him by our blessed Lord. He broke his promise, viz. 'though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny

thee.' (Matt. xxvi. 35.) He is ashamed of him, whom he had publicly acknowledged to be the Son of God; offends his neighbour; strengthens the enemies of Christ in their wickedness; and by his pusillanimity and baseness renders satan bolder and more importunate in his temptation. However he might extenuate his crime, and excuse this precipitate rashness in himself, the Spirit of God calls the action by its real name. Peter's lie was of such a nature, that though it saved his life without hurting any one, yet we do not hear that the Holy Ghost excuses it, as a lie of necessity, but brands it as an infamous denial of Christ.

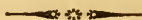
2. He that has not yet denied his immoderate love of life, is in danger, on the first trial, of denying his Lord and Saviour. One of these two things we must choose: Either our life must be renounced when Christ requires it, (Luke ix. 24.) or we shall be apt to deny Christ on any exigency. For when any danger occurs for the sake of the word, either of exile, imprisonment, or death, if our life be dearer to us than Christ and his religion, and we are not ready and willing to offer it up to him, who has given his life a sacrifice for us, we pave the way for denying Christ and his sacred truths. Therefore we are not to think those words of Christ hard saying, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple.' (Luke xiv. 26.) This injunction of our blessed Lord is rather to be accounted a preservative against the sin of final apostacy; and consequently not a burden, but a kindness. It is sufficient, that the Lord Jesus is willing to give us strength; it is sufficient, that he has promised to give us a better and more durable existence, in exchange for this wretched, precarious, and transitory being; and to recompense the short momentary sufferings of this life, with an eternal weight of glory.

3. Peter's denial of Christ was a considerable aggravation of the sufferings of our blessed Lord.—Certainly it was not without design, that all the four Evangelists (though some are more circumstantial in the account than the others) have inserted this incident in the history of the passion. Thus the spirit of prophecy had before declared, that this would be a part of the Messiah's sufferings, viz. that his lovers and friends should stand aloof from his sore ; (Psalm xxxviii. 11.) that he was become a stranger unto his brethren, and an alien unto his mother's children. (Psalm lxix. 8.) How did this base ingratitude and perfidy of Peter wound the faithful heart of the blessed Jesus ! How deeply must it have affected him, to see that the subtle fiend had now got the better of the most intrepid and eldest of the apostles, and thought to gain an easy conquest over the rest. Hence our blessed Saviour had particularly prayed for him, 'that his faith might not fail.' (Luke xxii. 32.) But we must consider that all our inconstancy and infidelity contributed to increase the sufferings of Jesus Christ. We, in the person of our first parents, entered into conversation with the enemy of God, as Peter here intrudes himself into the company of the enemies of Christ. We plunged ourselves into danger, out of a fatal curiosity to taste the forbidden fruit ; as his curiosity of seeing what would be the event, drew him into the snare of temptation. As he denied Christ, so we denied the Lord our creator, and, as it were, impiously said, 'I know thee not ; who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice ?' O how often have we behaved as strangers to our Lord and Master, when owning ourselves the servants of God might have drawn some inconvenience or danger on our heads. How much more prone are we, by the corruption of our nature, to deny God, rather than the world ? All these crimes were to be expiated by our redeemer ;

for which, praised be his holy name, now and forevermore.

THE PRAYER.

O most faithful Saviour! We praise thee for thy mercy, who in thy Word hast given us examples, that may make us wise unto salvation. Preserve us from all rashness, sinful curiosity, and presumption, and all reliance on our own strength; which pave the way to our fall from grace. Withdraw our hearts from an inordinate love of earthly things, and let us value nothing so much, as to be willing to forfeit thy favour to attain it. Make us, we beseech thee, renounce that culpable love of our own life, which may induce to deny thy truths; and enable us rather to lay down our lives than deny thee in the day of trouble, and consequently be denied by thee before thy Father and his holy angels. May we henceforth give thee real proofs of our fidelity and unshaken constancy in all trials and temptations! Amen.



CONSIDERATION VIII.

CHRIST INTERROGATED THE FIRST TIME BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL JUDICATURE.

‘THE High Priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine, Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogues, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing: Why askest thou me? Ask them who heard me, what I said unto them: Behold they know what I said.’ (John xviii. 19, 20, 21.)

These words inform us how our blessed Lord was first interrogated before the spiritual court of the Jews. They exhibit

First, The question put by the High Priest.

Secondly, The answer Jesus made to his question.

I. In the question we are to consider, first, the person that proposes it, and, secondly, the purport of his question.

First, The person that proposed this question was Caiaphas the High Priest. A great assembly consisting of the chief Priests, and Elders of the people, had been convened at his house, in the night-time, in order to try Jesus of Nazareth, who was now brought before them, and to pass sentence of death upon him. But the High Priest was, as it were, the mouth of this august assembly, and sharpened the keen arrows which those venerable hypocrites had forged in their iniquitous cabals. As it was the insidious practice of our Lords enemies, before this time, to put to him all kinds of ensnaring questions, in order to draw some unguarded expression from his mouth, for which they might accuse him; so this crafty method was observed in the first question here put to Jesus. It was indeed a duty incumbent on the High Priest, to keep a watchful eye on the purity of the doctrines taught in Israel, lest any false prophet should arise and draw the people to apostacy from the law of God, introduce pernicious errors, and disturb the peace of the church. But in this enquiry, such care for the purity of the doctrine Jesus taught is only a mere pretence, with which these blood-thirsty judges palliate their cruelty. This was therefore an hypocritical question, in which the love of truth had not the least share; for it proceeded from inveterate malice, and a wicked intention. It had long since been determined to destroy Jesus, however innocent, as the only expedient, in the opinion of Caiaphas, for quieting the Jewish church, now disturbed by his new doctrine. Here this impious pontiff erects the first inquisition, and endeavours by insidious questions of various kinds to get something from our Saviour's

mouth, on account of which he might pronounce sentence of death upon him with some appearance of justice. He would not venture at once to accuse a person who was perfectly innocent; but first, by examining him, thought to procure matter to form a charge upon. Thus he shewed an equal mixture of craftiness and malice in this proceeding. This is the person who proposed the question.

Secondly, The purport of this question is thus related: 'The High Priest then asked Jesus concerning his disciples, and his doctrine.' Our blessed Saviour had been brought hither in the night with swords and staves, as a murderer. Hence it might be naturally concluded, that at his examination, the first question proposed to him would have been, What hast thou done? But Caiaphas's own conscience sufficiently convinced him, that Jesus had done no evil, and that by this question he should have come short of his wicked aim. For our blessed Saviour was known all over Judea to be a public benefactor; so that Caiaphas himself must have blushed, had he charged him with any thing that was criminal. He likewise thought that it would be more agreeable to his high office in the Jewish church, to question the prisoner concerning his disciples, and his doctrine. He therefore first enquires concerning his disciples; and would induce our blessed Lord to discover the names of his followers and adherents, and to give an account why he procured such a retinue to himself? by what authority he had made choice of Twelve Apostles, and seventy other disciples, exclusive of the former; and to go about the country with these, and draw after him such a number of the common people, and lead them by thousands into the wilderness? These were things which directly tended to create a tumult and rebellion. At the same time, this question seems to carry with it a tacit reproach, that his disciples were no sooner well informed of

the badness of their master's cause, than they forsook him and fled.

The High Priest farther asked our Saviour concerning his doctrine, What the substance and design of it was? and whether it agreed with the law of Moses, and the traditions of the elders? or whether it was contrary to either of these, or different from them? As the drift of the first question, concerning his disciples, was to accuse our Saviour of seditious practices, namely, that he went about setting himself up for a king, and by gaining to himself a numerous party, to establish himself in the dignity he had assumed; so the other question, relating to his doctrine, aimed at convicting him of heresy, as having deceived the people, and seduced them to depart from the law of Moses. Now, as Jesus promulgated his doctrines on mountains and in desarts, he invalidated the traditions of the Jewish fathers; and as he explained the law of Moses in a new and unusual manner, it was quite evident to the priests that he must be a seducer and a heretic. Thus the High Priest thought, that if he could with any probability convict Jesus of those two crimes, he should bring the affair to a speedy issue. To be convicted of heresy, and departing from the law of Moses, was alone sufficient for condemning him to death in the spiritual court; and the charge of sedition was calculated, to induce the civil power the more readily to put the sentence of death, passed on him by the ecclesiastical court, in execution. Such was the address and cunning of the High Priest in asking this question. But, before we proceed to the answer which our blessed Lord made him, we shall make the following observations on this head.

1. The greatest injustice is practised in the world under the appearance of justice. Nothing could be more iniquitous than the whole process carried on against our blessed Saviour. The conclusion of this

villainous plot was answerable to the beginning of it. The resolution had been taken long before, that Jesus should die. In the next place, it was contrived how they might, by captious and ensnaring questions, extort a confession from him, which might be deemed by them a crime worthy of death. However this flagrant injustice was carried on under the appearance of equity. An examination was begun, and enquiry was made into the nature of Christ's doctrine: After this, witnesses were heard; all this, however, was a mere outside show, and vile deceit. This flagrant injustice the Son of God submitted to, in order to expiate for the innumerable kinds of injustice which are, by wicked men, varnished over with the appearance of equity. How many thousand wicked schemes are carried into execution under a plausible appearance? How often, for instance, among learned men, is a pretended zeal for the honour of God and purity of doctrine made the pretence, under which a faithful servant of God is molested and injured? How often, among men in power, is the pretence of doing justice made a covering for committing violence, and all kinds of injustice? How often, in private life, are iniquitous designs carried on against another man's property, under the appearance of having a right to it, till he is ruined by tedious law-suits? Therefore, as the Son of God was obliged to suffer under the appearance of justice, it should inspire us with a just abhorrence for all indirect proceedings, all hypocrisy, dissimulation, and secret artifices, that we may never more stain our consciences with such iniquities: But if they have been already polluted with such wicked practices, let us wash and cleanse ourselves from them in the pure blood of the immaculate Lamb of God.

2. These insidious questions, which the Son of God permitted to be put to him, should extinguish in us a fondness for unnecessary questions in the ex-

amination of divine truths. It was not without design, that Christ our only mediator permitted these crafty questions of his enemies to be put to him : this is a part of his sufferings which must have sensibly affected him : By this he has atoned for all unnecessary questions to which we are often prompted by an impertinent curiosity, especially in divine things ; and great numbers, particularly among the learned, are too fond of questions and strifes, of words, which tend to no manner of edification. (Tim. vi. 4.) How often do we summon Christ and his Almighty Father before our arrogant and presumptuous reason, and require an account of his wise decrees and adorable proceedings ? This our sinful curiosity our blessed Lord has atoned for in the instance before us. At the same time, he has thereby sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, who often, in times of persecution, are ensnared with insidious questions ; and in this iniquitous practice the popish inquisitors, to their eternal infamy, are known particularly to excel.

How often was it seen during the heathen and anti-christian persecutions, that a faithful minister of the gospel, after being apprehended, was put to the torture, in order to get from him the names of his disciples and hearers, that they likewise might be apprehended ? How often were private Christians tormented and harrassed in the most barbarous and cruel manner, that they might discover their heretical acquaintance ; though the greatest part of them chose to endure any pain or torture, rather than be guilty of such a treachery ? This infamous practice their successors, the inhuman inquisitors, carefully imitate. Thus has the Son of God, by being judicially questioned concerning his disciples, also sanctified this kind of suffering and cruel treatment.

3. It is not unusual for the best designs, and most laudable actions, of the servants of God to be unjustly suspected by the world. Christ in choosing

his disciples had the most beneficent views, and the doctrine which he taught was nothing less than declaration of the counsel of God concerning our eternal salvation. Nevertheless, he permitted both the choice of his disciples, and the purity of his heavenly doctrine, to be loaded with an unjust suspicion. His appointing disciples was looked upon as having a tendency to tumult and rebellion; and his pure and salutary doctrine fell under the suspicion of being infected with the poison of heresy. By this kind of suffering he was to atone for our depravity, in being so ready to put the worst construction on the designs, words, and actions of our neighbour, and to impute to him such wicked intentions as never entered into his thoughts. Nor is this all: We are impious enough to entertain unworthy thoughts of the views, ways, designs, and dispensations of God himself, and to arraign his wisdom and justice. Our blessed Lord has also, by this part of his sufferings, sanctified the sufferings of his servants when they are oppressed with false and undeserved suspicions, and when their most innocent views and laudable designs are branded with the worst constructions. Therefore when a Christian, in following Jesus Christ, meets with the like ill-treatment, let him commune with his own heart, and say to himself: "Was my Saviour no better treated? did he see his divine proceedings attended with vile suspicions? What am I, that I should be better treated than my Lord and Master?" This consideration should induce us to abstain from ill suspicions, and by no means to indulge it, so far as to molest the true and faithful servants of God; since by such practices we commit those sins against his members, which the High Priest and Sanhedrim at Jerusalem were guilty of towards the person of Christ.

II. As to our blessed Lord's answer to the foregoing question; it is related in the 20th and 21st

verses. (John xviii.) However malicious and ensnaring the High Priest's question was, yet our blessed Saviour answered it; teaching us by this behaviour, that we should be always ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason for our proceedings, (1 Peter iii. 14.) even though, in so doing, they may have ill-designs. Our blessed Lord would also particularly shew by his great example, that the servants of God, when endeavours are used to render their doctrines liable to be suspected of having a pernicious tendency, are absolutely obliged, with all proper freedom, to vindicate them against such unjust suspicions.

As to the purport of the answer itself; it is remarkable that our blessed Lord passes over in silence the first part of the question, which concerned his disciples; and this he probably did for the following reasons.

1. Because in this point the scripture itself spoke for him. For as he had hitherto sufficiently demonstrated to the Jews that he was the true Messiah, it was necessary that he should have disciples; the Messiah being introduced by the prophet speaking in this manner: 'Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.' (Isaiah viii. 16, 17.) Now that these were the words of the Messiah was allowed by the Jews even in our Saviour's time, as appears from the epistle to the Hebrews, Chap. ii. 13. 'Behold I, and the children, or disciples, which God hath given me.'

2. Because his disciples were then but weak instruments, and unexperienced soldiers. Judas had betrayed him; Peter began to deny him; and all the rest had forsaken him and fled. As they had shewed much weakness when their Master was with them, these artful judges would have made a handle of that

against Christ, and imputed to him whatever should be done amiss by his irresolute disciples. The faithful servants of God are now frequently treated in the same manner; the world crying out against them at every misbehaviour of any of their hearers. But Jesus, by his silence, eludes this artifice.

3. Because this point is answered in our Saviour's defence of his doctrine: for the only view he had in appointing disciples was to assist him in the promulgation of his doctrine. Therefore, by proving that no suspicion of heresy or sedition could be charged on his doctrine, he at the same time proved that by choosing disciples, he had no design of raising a tumult or rebellion.

4. Because this great council, after the ascension of Christ, was to receive a full answer to this part of the question. The disciples of the blessed Jesus, by the bold testimony they bore every where to the truth of the resurrection of Christ, caused these judges an infinite deal of trouble and vexation. (Acts ii. iii. iv. v.)

As to the second part of this question, which related to his doctrine, Jesus returned a more direct answer. In this we may observe, first, a declaration of his manner of preaching; secondly, a remonstrance to the High Priest.

In the account of his preaching, Jesus informs the High Priest in what manner, and where he taught, in these words: 'I spake openly to the world;' or, as he says in another place (John viii. 26.) 'I spake to, or before, the world what I have heard of the Father.' By this answer he gives them to understand, that with great freedom he had declared the truth to all sorts of men who were willing to hear it; and this is no more than what his own enemies were ready to acknowledge, when they said to him: 'Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou re-

gardest not the person of men.' (Matt. xxii. 16.) He did not preach one set of doctrines among his friends, and another quite opposite to it, when he observed any spies or informers had mingled with the croud. On the contrary he uniformly adhered to the truth, and declared it indiscriminately to the consciences of all men, before audiences of every kind ; for he often had shewn the way of salvation, sometimes in allegories and parables, and sometimes in plainer terms, to many thousands who were come together to hear the word of God from him.

Our blessed Lord farther mentions the places where he taught, namely, in the synagogues, and in the temple, whither the Jews from all parts usually resorted. Thus he makes use of those public places in which, at those times, God's word was read and explained. When he was at Jerusalem, he used to go into the temple, where, in the court of the congregation of Israel, were several porticoes, or cloisters, in which the people were instructed in the law. When he was at other places he usually went into the public synagogues, or schools, in which a stranger was allowed to teach the people who were present ; for in the beginning of our Saviour's ministry, we were told, that 'Jesus went through all Galilee about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.' (Matt. iv. 23. ix. 35.) In such places of public resort did Jesus teach. Nor did he go thither only to exclaim against the prevailing vices of the age, to censure the wicked teachers of the people, and to expose their hypocrisy ; but to declare the truths of his kingdom, and to apply to the hearts of men the word of faith in him, and repentance towards God.

Our blessed Lord also farther adds, 'And in secret have I said nothing.' Here it may be objected, Did not Christ often preach in the desert, on mountains, and even in private houses ? It is true, he did ;

but never in a clandestine, timorous, and suspicious manner. Every one was at liberty to come and hear what was said; nor were spies and informers, who are always at hand, debarred of access. And when he sometimes discoursed privately with his disciples, or with other persons, as Nicodemus, (John iii.) it was on no other subject, but what he publicly taught, and inculcated. Some things were more clearly explained to his disciples, that they, in proper time, might communicate them to others; as in Mark (chap. iv. 10, 11.) 'And when he was alone, they that were about him, with the Twelve, asked him of the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.' But this was, at the same time, his express injunction to his disciples, (Matt. x. 27.) 'What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what you hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops.'

Our blessed Saviour's design in teaching publicly was to avoid the suspicion either of sedition or heresy. Those who have any designs against the public tranquillity, generally seek by-places, and clandestinely confer with their adherents, in order to concert the safest measures to execute their wicked purposes. False prophets likewise affect privacy, for which practice they had very good reason at that time; such persons among the Jews being punished with death. But our blessed Lord affirms before the whole council of the chief Priests and Elders, that he had openly spoke what he accounted conducive to the happiness, and necessary for the salvation, of mankind.

Thus the Messiah is before represented to us in the Old Testament, under the character of Heavenly Wisdom, as one who would speak openly, 'Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the street. She crieth in the chief places of concourse,

in the opening of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words.' (Prov. i. 20, 21.) The Messiah, according to the prophet, saith: 'I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth:—I the Lord spake righteousness; I declare things that are right.' (Isaiah xlv. 19.) We see how the Messiah, many ages before, had obviated the suspicion with which he was to be branded in his sufferings, namely, that he was a secret promoter of all kinds of pernicious doctrines. This is the first part of our Saviour's answer, containing a declaration of his manner of preaching.

The second part consists of a remonstrance to the High Priest; in which our Lord censures his method of proceeding with a becoming freedom, and proposes a better method for coming at the truth.

He censures his method of proceeding in these words, 'Why askest thou me?' As if he had said, You do not use the proper means to come at the truth. Can the person accused bear witness in his own cause? For if I was to give you a detail of my doctrine, and lay open to you the whole system, so that you yourself could not make any just exceptions against it; yet you would readily palliate your iniquitous cause with such an evasion as this: "Now he prevaricates and dissembles, in order to avoid the danger that threatens him. He dares not, in our presence, avow his heretical opinions, and detestable blasphemies; but when he is among the poor ignorant populace, he imperceptibly infuses into them the secret poison of his secret doctrines." Thus our blessed Saviour by this question would give his judges to understand, that this manner of enquiring after truth was neither just nor legal.

On the contrary, he proposes a better method to come at the truth, by adding, 'Ask them who heard me, what I said unto them; Behold, they know what I said.' These words are manifest testimony of the

justice of Christ's cause: This was not the answer of a poor, dispirited, and affrighted criminal; but of a person of wisdom and understanding, of integrity and resolution. This divine teacher had no reason to make any difficulty of appealing to the consciences of his hearers; nay, he is not afraid that his cause should be tried by his very enemies. Possibly, the very officers who had been sent to apprehend Jesus, but returned without him, saying, 'Never man spake like this man,' (John vii. 46.) might be then standing before the door of the great hall. These, and such other witnesses, should have been heard; and then the truth would have probably come to light. Besides, this was the method of proceeding in such cases, appointed by the Jewish law, that witnesses should be confronted with the person accused, and that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every truth should be established. Therefore, the High Priest is justly reproved by the Lord Jesus, for neglecting this prescribed method of proceeding in judicial cases. This may suffice for clearing up the sense of our Saviour's answer.

Some important doctrines may be learned from the freedom with which this answer was given, and also from the substance of the answer itself. From the former, we may learn the following truths.

1. A faithful servant of God ought to face the enemies of truth, with a becoming firmness and resolution. Christ has not only gone before us as an illustrious example; but has also obtained for us the strength required to imitate him in this particular. Otherwise a servant of God, in such circumstances, might be easily discouraged by the consideration of his own weakness, and the power of his enemies; but Christ, who with his spotless innocence covers the failings of his servants, has acquired for them power from on high, to present themselves undaunted in the midst of their enemies, and boldly to open their mouths in declaring the truth.

2. An undaunted freedom and resolution, in facing the disguised enemies of truth, is entirely reconcilable to humility and discretion. This discourse of our blessed Lord was certainly seasoned with the salt of holiness; and flowed from a laudable zeal for the honour of his prophetic office, which was now unjustly branded with the suspicion of heresy. Such an undaunted answer the High Priest little expected from a person, who stood bound before him as a prisoner, and whom they had already pre-judged. But it was fit this haughty pontiff should know, that he had to do with a person of transcendant dignity and excellence. The followers of Jesus Christ should exert this holy confidence on such occasions; and though the world, in such cases, is extremely captious, and cannot bear any thing of this freedom in Christians, (as our Saviour was struck on the face, for freely vindicating his innocence;) yet their Mediator has obtained for them this freedom, and they are not in the least culpable when they make use of it, within the limits of discretion and decency.

3. A good conscience is the only source of true freedom, and undaunted resolution. Of this we have here a plain instance in our blessed Lord. As he was not conscious of any heresy, or seditious designs, he might with a becoming freedom and boldness repel such an aspersion. Therefore, whoever will imitate Christ in this particular, must have a pure and unspotted conscience. The men of this world also will often shew themselves bold and resolute, and in their wicked transactions will put on the mask of freedom and confidence, which, at the bottom, is nothing but a carnal presumption; nor does it last any longer, than while an evil conscience is laid asleep, and ceases to perform its office. But when the conscience is once awakened by the voice of God, and presents the sinner with a black catalogue of his most secret wickedness, and private villainies;

then he is appalled, and all his affected boldness and intrepidity vanish away. None but the children of God, whose consciences are appeased by the blood of the Lamb, have a true confidence and undaunted firmness; which even the children of this world cannot forbear secretly admiring, though they are strangers to the cause from whence they flow. Have we cause therefore, to behave with freedom and boldness? Is this foundation laid in us? Or do our consciences reproach us with some heinous sin, which we would by no means have others come to the knowledge of, as it would expose us to shame and confusion? We have then reason to be timorous and dejected. If the latter be our case, let us amend our lives, and hasten to the fountain, which was freely opened for sin and uncleanness; namely, to the blood of the son of God, which is the only balm to quiet an evil conscience.

Those persons who propose to be one day public preachers in the Church of Christ, ought to be more particularly careful in their younger years to beware of all sinful and reprehensible behaviour; and carefully to maintain a conscience void of offence. For how should they, in the course of their future ministry, shew that undaunted courage? how can they express a noble zeal and becoming freedom in reproofing the wicked? if their own consciences be wounded, and reproach them, and say to every one that has ill-treated this monitor in his bosom, "Thou thyself wert formerly no better, thou hast even committed those sins which thou at present inveighest against; nor hast thou yet come to any account with thy Creator, nor supplicated for the remission of the sins of thy youth by the blood of Christ." Therefore it behoves every one who is intended for the ministry, to be no less diligent in preserving a pure and unsullied conscience, than in acquiring knowledge in his holy profession. Let every one preserve his conscience

unhurt, as he would the apple of his eye. For as we treat this divine guest within us, so will it also treat us. If we shew no regard to our conscience, and wound it time after time; it will take an opportunity of revenging itself, and will fill us with terrifying reflections, and painful remorse: But if we endeavour to purify it in the blood of Christ, and afterwards give it up to the inspection and guidance of God's holy spirit; it will befriend us through life, and comfort us at the awful hour of death, and the tremendous day of judgment.

From the purport of the answer itself, which our blessed Lord made the High Priest, we may draw the following inferences.

1. A true Christian ought to avoid all appearance of evil. This maxim, which St. Paul lays down, (1 Thess. v. 22.) the Son of God has himself practised, and illustrated by his example, and has, at the same time, imparted strength for his followers to walk unblameable in his blessed footsteps. They should therefore use all diligence to walk cautiously, and without offence, amidst a sinful generation; to consider that many eyes are intent on their words and actions; and that the world gladly lays hold on every opportunity of calumniating and reviling them. They ought therefore to be watchful, not only to avoid all evil, but the appearance of it. But if, notwithstanding all their caution, their most innocent words and actions are scandalously misrepresented by the world, let them comfort themselves by the example of Jesus Christ, who was traduced without a cause: Let them wrap themselves up in their own integrity, and recommend their cause to God.

2. As the doctrines of Christ were openly promulgated, so are they to be openly and cheerfully professed. St. Paul, in the name of all Christians, says: 'We are the children of the light and of the day.' (1 Thess. v. 5.) Therefore, instead of being ashamed

of Christ's religion, we are to own it in the face of all the world ; for it contains nothing contrary to the principles of sound reason, nothing which clashes with the ideas we have of God and his attributes. Whoever therefore is ashamed of the Christian doctrine ; nay, whoever does not in heart and mouth profess it ; as it were, reproaches Christ, and brings on him an unworthy suspicion, like the false accusation of the Jewish Sanhedrim ; namely, that he went about clandestinely, propagating such doctrines as could not bear the light. Indeed, when no public persecutions are on foot, it is an easy matter to profess the faith of Christ without fear or reserve ; but at a time when the profession of Christianity exposes a man to the most cruel torments, it requires more courage and fortitude than can be derived from mere nature and reason. Our blessed Saviour, by his holy firmness and intrepidity, acquired that gift for his flock ; and therefore, we must humbly intreat him, so to convince our hearts of the truth of his heavenly doctrines, that we may not hesitate to make an unreserved profession of his religion ; and, as it becomes the children of light and of the day, to lay down our lives for his sake.

Whoever therefore, is conscious that he is still a child of darkness, and hateth the light ; that he is still engaged in clandestine schemes, and flagitious crimes, that shun the light ; let him earnestly desire to be delivered from the power of the prince of darkness, and repair to Christ, the light of the world, who publicly taught in the face of day, and openly performed the work which his father had given him to do. His merciful redeemer will deliver him from all the bonds of darkness, from all secret fear of shame ; and will enable him to walk undaunted with a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

On the other hand, whoever has hitherto endeavoured to avoid every appearance of evil ; and not

only forbears all outward behaviour that might injure his good name, but walks uprightly before God, with a pure conscience ; such a one may follow the example of Christ with the more confidence : so that if his words and actions are misconstrued, he can say with his Lord and Saviour, I have spoken and acted openly in the face of the world ; I have no sinister designs to carry on ; I am conscious of no wicked artifice, or evil intentions. The omniscient God is the judge of my secret thoughts : he knows that the thoughts and intents of my heart are sincere and upright before him. Thus shall a good Christian daily acquire greater boldness to look the enemies of Christ in the face, and nobly to despise their groundless suspicions, and malicious calumnies ; for if he is absolved by his own conscience, he is well assured that, in the day of the Lord Jesus, his innocence will be made manifest in the presence of angels and the whole race of mankind.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living Saviour ! blessed be thy holy name, for the grace which thou hast been pleased to grant me at this hour, for the consideration of thy sacred word. Oh, that thou wouldest write in our hearts all the wholesome doctrines which we have now heard ; and powerfully remind us of them, on every occasion that may require such incentives to virtue. Bring to the light of thy gospel those who are fatally given to hypocrisy, deceit, and the works of darkness : Discover to them the depravity of their hearts, impress on their minds an ingenuous and salutary shame for their evil doings ; and renew them to salvation, that they may henceforth walk before thee in real innocence and uprightness of heart. Make every one of us strictly careful to preserve a good conscience, as the source of all true courage and confidence, that we may be comforted amidst all

the groundless suspicions and false accusations, with which the world is ready to load us. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IV.

THE UNJUST TREATMENT OF CHRIST AT HIS FIRST EXAMINATION BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT.

‘AND when Jesus had thus spoken, one of the officers, who stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hands, saying, Answerest thou the High Priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me? (Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest.)’ (John xviii. 22, 23, 24.)

These words exhibit to us the unjust treatment of our blessed Saviour at his first hearing; and of this we have two instances in the words before us.

I. In the first instance, we may observe, 1. Wherein this ill-treatment consisted, 2. The plea that was urged for it, and 3. Our Saviour’s behaviour on this occasion.

1. It is said, ‘When Jesus had thus spoken, one of the officers, who stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand.’

The person who thus injured our blessed Lord, was one of the officers who stood by, one of the officers belonging to the Sanhedrim, who after apprehending Christ in the garden, had brought him to the High Priest’s palace; but now stood close by him watching him, lest he should break the cords with which he was bound, and make his escape. This officer was so provoked and enraged at the boldness of our blessed Saviour’s answer, in the presence of the whole assembly of the supreme council, that he insolently offered this injury to the sacred person of

Christ. But it is not lawful for the officers, belonging to a court of judicature, in the least to anticipate the judge during the trial of the prisoner. This miscreant, however, well knew that on this occasion, he might presume thus far; and that instead of being punished, or even reprov'd, he would rather be commended and rewarded for this insult to the prisoner. Possibly, the High Priest himself made a sign to him to strike our blessed Lord; as Ananias, another High Priest, expressly ordered St. Paul to be struck on the face, for answering him with the same undaunted freedom. (Acts xxiii. 2.) Some are of opinion, that this officer was Malchus, whose ear our Saviour had healed, after it had been cut off by Peter. If this be true, the insult received an additional guilt from the ingratitude of this officer.

The insult done to our blessed Saviour was a blow on the face, by St. John called a stroke given with the palm of the hand on the cheek. This was both painful, especially as it may be supposed to have come from an armed hand, and likewise contumelious; though the abuse exceeded the pain. Of all the ill-treatment which Job received from his friends, he accounts this the most sensible indignity, when he complains, 'They have smitten me on the cheek reproachfully.' (Job xvi. 10.) Whoever struck an Israelite with his fist was obliged to pay a shekel, as a fine for the affront; but striking him on the face was liable to a much greater mulct; such a blow being accounted more reproachful, and contemptuous, than any other injury of that kind.

But the indignity was the more heinous in this instance, if we consider, that this officer was one of the devil's meanest instruments; that the person struck was the only begotten Son of God, the Lord of Glory, whose face, but a little before, shone like the sun on Mount Tabor, and, before whom the angels themselves veil their faces; and that this affront was

offered to Christ in the presence of the High Priest, and all the judges of the Sanhedrim, who represented the whole people of the Jews. Therefore, as the head and chiefs of the Jewish nation countenanced this illegal blow, and approved of it by silence ; it was the same thing as if the Son of God, the judge of Israel, had been struck on the cheek by the whole Jewish people. But as the wretch who offered this injury, together with the heads of the Jewish nation, were instigated to this villainy by the prince of darkness ; it was as if the Son of God had received the blow on the cheek from Satan himself, who probably thought, that by this unexpected stroke, to ruffle the temper of our suffering Mediator, and to abash and confound him. This indignity, which the Lord of Glory suffered, was exceedingly aggravated by all these circumstances.

But we are not authorised by this, to rail and inveigh against, to curse and execrate that person who offered this indignity to our blessed Lord ; but to consider, that our manifold sins and impieties also had a hand in it. For our sins were the cause of all the contumely, disgrace, and pain, which the blessed Jesus underwent ; and consequently they must have contributed to this injurious treatment. Hence we should,

First, Be convinced of the greatness, and detestable nature of sin. By the fall of our first parents, we had delivered ourselves up to Satan, into the most infamous slavery, and given the most scandalous lusts free dominion over us. Now, as Christ was to expiate our sins, and make satisfaction for them to the Divine Justice, behold, the blessed Jesus is to suffer himself to be given up to the brutish treatment of the most impious slaves, and to be reviled and injured by them with impunity ; every one being allowed to use him with the most insupportable insolence and barbarity. We should never have imagined, that

sin is so detestable a thing, were we not convinced of it by the sufferings of the Son of God.

Secondly, Besides the heinousness of our sins, we should hence learn the greatness of the love which Jesus Christ bears to mankind, who so willingly submitted to all kinds of injuries and affronts, to redeem our lost souls, to deliver us from the ignominious bondage and to save us from that infamy and disgrace, and those ever-during sufferings, which otherwise would have been our lot. As in every deliberate sin, we, as it were, lift up our sacrilegious hands against God, it would have covered our faces with confusion, at his awful tribunal ; and we should have been delivered up to be beaten with many stripes by Satan and his reprobate angels to all eternity, had not the Son of the Father, the Angel of his Presence, whose eyes sparkle with the love and benevolence of the Father of Mercies, presented himself in our stead, exposed his cheeks to the smiters, and suffered himself to be struck by the vilest slaves. Oh, what unmeasurable love was displayed in this unparalleled meekness and patience of the Lamb of God !

Let us express our gratitude to our blessed Saviour for his voluntary submission to this base indignity.— Let us, when under the severest temptations, when the messenger of Satan buffets us, think on this impious blow which he suffered, and seek comfort in it. Let us also pray to our faithful Redeemer, that he would make us willing, for his sake, to undergo the greatest ignominy and contempt ; and even to suffer patiently the most injurious blows, when the profession of his truth requires it. When the prophet Micah declared the truth to king Ahab, he was contemptuously struck on the face by Zedekiah, one of the false prophets. (1 Kings xxii. 24.) And when Paul, in the presence of the High Priest, asserted his innocence, and the integrity of his conscience, the haughty pontiff ordered the Apostle to be struck on the face. (Acts xxii. 2.)

2. As for the plea that was urged for this injurious treatment of our blessed Lord, it is contained in these words: 'Answerest thou the High Priest so?' By this plea, the miscreant would fain justify his vile action, and represent it as an instance of zeal for the honour and dignity of the High Priest.

3. Lastly, We are to consider our blessed Lord's behaviour on this provoking occasion. Though he was smitten, he did not strike again; though he suffered, he threatened not. He did not command the heavens to pour down fire and brimstone on the guilty head of this impious wretch, nor the earth to open under his feet, and swallow him up. However, the blessed Jesus was not entirely silent at such a public insult, and unprecedented treatment, which was also approved of by the silence of the whole assembly; but with equal discretion and mildness, he shewed the injury that was done him.

This remonstrance of our blessed Lord consists of a double plea, grounded on his preceding apology, which also consisted of two parts. As if he had said: In my answer I have either spoken well or ill: If I spoke ill, let it be proved; but if what I said was reasonable, why am I thus buffeted?

The first sentence in the Greek original does not signify, if I have spoken evil things, lies, slander, and calumny, against the High Priest; but if I have spoken in an ill, rude, and indecent manner, and violated the respect due to the High Priest; for in this consisted our Saviour's pretended crime. They thought, that how true soever what he alleged might be, yet he grossly offended the High Priest, in the form and manner of his defence.

The second sentence contains a just demand. If I have been wanting in the respect which the High Priest requires, bear witness of the evil. As if he had said, "I here stand in the presence of the whole court. If it be supposed that I have spoken ill be-

fore the High Priest, and violated the respect due to his person and dignity, I ought to be previously accused of it; and not only accused, but likewise convicted and proved guilty of the crime: this the rules of common equity and justice require, and nothing can be more illegal and unjust than to begin with the execution, and punish a crime which has not yet been proved."

The other plea in this remonstrance of Christ includes, first, a condition. 'If well,' i. e. "If I have spoken what it just and reasonable; if my words contained nothing criminal, rude, or disrespectful; if I have only spoken the truth with that decent freedom, which becomes a good cause and a good conscience; make it appear to the High Priest and the whole council."

Secondly, a just reproof, 'Why strikest thou me?' This reproof is given by way of question, as it more emphatically sets forth the injustice of the procedure, 'Why, says our blessed Lord, strikest thou me? THOU, who hast neither right nor command so to do, strikest ME, who am not yet convicted of having committed any fault, that deserves this public insult.' This reproof, indeed, our Saviour directs to the servant who had given him the blow; but at the same time, it is his design to touch the consciences of every member of the council: for, however these judges might conceit that, as they sat in Moses's chair, and administered justice in God's name, all the decrees and sentences that they past were to be obeyed as the divine decrees; yet Christ intimates to them, that they allowed of all kinds of iniquitous practices in their court, and that the fundamental principles of justice were openly violated there.

This is briefly the import of our Saviour's remonstrance. But some impious objector perhaps will say, Why did not Christ also turn his other cheek and offer it to the officer, after he had struck him on

one, according to the doctrine he had taught ? (Matt. v. 39.) To this it may be answered, that Christ, even in the instance before us, perfectly conformed to what he had inculcated. He does not go out of the court after he had received this unjust blow, as by his Almighty power he might have done. He does not offer at any resistance, meditates no revenge, for which his omnipotence could not want instruments or power. He did not command that the servant's hand should wither, like that of king Jeroboam, when he stretched it out against the prophet of the Lord : But he stood still and unmoved among his enemies : being ready to suffer himself to be struck on the other cheek, if the malice of this wretch had gone so far, or God had permitted him. Nay, what is more, we know that a little time after, when he had been condemned to die, he offered his face to blows, and even to greater indignities : for it is said, (Matt. xxvi. 67,) 'Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands.' So that our blessed Lord cannot, with any colour of reason, be accused of not behaving conformably to the doctrines he taught.

But from this very behaviour of Christ, we may learn the true meaning of his command in the fifth chapter of Matthew. We see by this instance, that a discreet remonstrance, or even a mild dissuasion from offering any farther injury, is by no means forbidden : but our Saviour's meaning seems to be this, 'That rather than have recourse to any violent methods of revenge, we ought, when denied the common protection of the magistracy, patiently to bear injuries. That this is the true import of our blessed Lord's words, we here learn from his own example, which in this as well as in other cases, is to be accounted the best illustration of his doctrine. Hence it sufficiently appears, that there is no just grounds for ridiculing this doctrine of Christ as an absurd and impracticable max-

im, and to rally Christians on this account, as Julian the apostate formerly did, and the modern infidels still do in imitation of so worthy an example.

Moreover, we are not only to admire and praise this gentleness of the blessed Jesus, but also to propose it for our imitation. When the question is, whether we must conform to Christ, who did not strike again when he was struck ; or the world, whose maxim it is, That a man of honour ought to revenge an affront or injury offered him, either with his tongue, his pen, or the sword ? No one who has any real regard for the name of Christ, but will confess that it is not the world, but Christ whom Christians are to imitate. Now, if, notwithstanding this confession, we in our actions prefer the sinful way of the world to the example of patience and gentleness exhibited by Christ, we shall one day hear that dreadful sentence from our supreme judge, ‘ Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant.’ Thou thyself couldest not but own, that my example was to be followed ; and yet hast suffered thyself to be carried away by the corrupt stream of a wicked custom. Now thou art justly condemned with the world, as thou hast preferred its sinful ways. Before we proceed to the second instance of the unjust treatment of our blessed Lord, we shall draw the following practical inferences.

1. The Son of God took on him the form of a servant, and was given up to be abused by the vilest slaves ; because men have given up their noble souls to the infamous slavery of sin and satan, of impetuous passions and impure desires, which Christ has atoned for, on our repentance, by this branch of his sufferings. On the other hand, he has obtained for his followers a powerful consolation under all pain and public insults, to which they are exposed for his sake. He has obtained for them an everlasting exemption from the eternal ignominy and disgrace, of

being given up to the insults and buffetings of satan; as offenders against the Supreme Majesty; and which they will incessantly feel, whom this incomprehensible love, which moved the Son of God to take upon him the pain and shame that they have deserved, does not bring to a sincere repentance and amendment of life.

2. In bearing witness to the truth, we are to expect nothing but contempt, injustice, and insults. If God does not leave the hands of the wicked at liberty to strike the witnesses of the truth, and insult them by any act of violence, they exercise their malicious tongues with more virulence in ridiculing, reviling, and calumniating the good and the virtuous. The wicked will give no quarter to any one who bears witness, that their works are evil. But it is infinitely better to suffer ourselves to be beaten and insulted with Christ for a short time, than, after being flattered and honoured with the wicked, to be given up to everlasting shame and disgrace. Let us not fear to tell the world its own; let us bear witness to the truth; but then, at the same time, let us prepare for those sufferings which are annexed to such sincerity. This ought more particularly to be observed by those, who one day are to march forth, and publicly to bear witness, against the wicked world.—They must early banish from their minds all fear of man, all false delicacy and shame. They must prepare themselves for the combat.

3. The world never makes less account of the rules of equity and justice than in its proceedings against Christ and his followers. An officer of a court of judicature is by no means permitted to interfere, during the examination of a criminal before a magistrate; and this servant of the High Priest would not have taken such liberty at the trial of the murderer Barabas, or any common malefactor. But against Christ and his members, the wicked presume

that they may commit any violence. These, they pretend, are patient sheep, who are to bear every outrage without opening their mouths. Nay, they make it a kind of diversion to bring their patience to the test, by the most flagrant acts of injustice, to see how much they can bear without resisting. This unjust and inhuman practice is thus described in the apocryphal book of wisdom, (Eccl. ii. 19.) ‘Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience.’

4. The vices of masters are generally copied by their servants. As the High Priest, the head of the Sanhedrim, was unjust and unmerciful; so were his officers and servants. This officer well knew how far he might venture; and possibly, he might read in the High Priest’s looks that it would be very acceptable to him, if he checked the boldness of Jesus of Nazareth with a blow on the face. Here was verified the observation of Solomon, (Prov. xxix. 12.) ‘If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.’ It is the same in other respects. For instance, if the master lives in excess and riot, the servants soon learn to walk in the same way of perdition. If the master or mistress, or both give themselves up to criminal love, a chaste servant in such a house would be deemed a wonder. Where the heads of the family live in discord and contention, quarrelling, cursing and swearing; the servants will soon copy these vices, will be continually at variance, and full of rage and malice against each other. Therefore, as the ill example of the heads of a family, causes such great offence; and this offence, according to the saying of Christ, (Matt. xviii. 7.) is followed by so dreadful a woe; how great is the obligation on those who preside over families, to set the best examples, of piety and virtue to their servants and dependents? that no ill behaviour of theirs may induce their inferiors to imitate their vices.

5. The more ardently a person loves the Lord Jesus, the more will he be affected by every part of his undeserved sufferings. It is remarkable, that of all the Evangelists, St. John only has taken notice of this blow, which was inflicted on our blessed Lord at his examination. Not that the other Evangelists and Apostles had no real love for their Master; but as St. John was the Lord's bosom disciple, and, of all the apostles, loved him with the most tender affection, so he was in a particular manner affected with every indignity, affront, and injury, offered to his beloved Master. This we shall also experience, whenever our hearts are inflamed with a truly cordial and ardent love of the Lord Jesus. We shall then particularly attend to every incident of his sufferings, and return him our sincerest thanks for every indignity, and every insult he endured. Every thorn that pierced him, every stripe or blow, every pang he felt, will sensibly affect us, and wound us to the heart. To such an intimate fellowship with Christ, and his sufferings, shall we be brought by a sincere love for him.

6. When we are more sensible of any injury done to our own character, or that of a friend, than when God's honour suffers any diminution, it is a sign that we do not love God above all things. Many are like this servant, whose blind zeal was all on fire at this supposed want of due respect for the High Priest. Many are transported with indignation, at an affront or injury done to a person for whom they have a particular regard, or even at any want of due ceremony towards him; whereas they can, with the greatest coolness, see the honour of God violated in the most flagrant manner. It behoves every one therefore to examine himself, whether he has a real zeal for the honour of God, and whether he is more concerned for the honour of Jesus Christ, than for his own, or that of any other man?

7. The patience and gentleness of Christ passes the comprehension of man. It still frequently falls out, that the patience and long-suffering of God seems unaccountable to his own children. When they see the prevalence of triumphant wickedness and impiety in the world, they are apt to think, and say within themselves, How can God any longer connive at such impious proceedings? How can he forbear from darting his thunder and lightning, and rousing all the elements against the wicked, to avenge his offended Majesty? But instead of wondering at the long-suffering of God, let us rather admire and adore his patience, as an inconceivable mystery. Let us rather be persuaded, that it is to his clemency we are indebted for our safety and salvation.

II. I shall now proceed to consider briefly the second instance of the unjust treatment, which our blessed Saviour met with at his examination; and this consisted in his being bound, when he was examined: 'Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest.' By taking notice of this circumstance, the Evangelist means to shew, that they proceeded against Jesus, quite contrary to all justice and equity, and even to the customs and laws of the Jews. For prisoners, when under examination, were loosed from their fetters, that they might make their answers with the greater freedom; but our blessed Lord was obliged to stand before them bound, with the manacles on his hands, as he was sent from Annas to Caiaphas the High Priest. This circumstance, at the same time, adds to the enormity of the injurious blow he received from an officer of the court, who was permitted to strike on the face a prisoner that was bound, and whose case was hardly begun to be enquired into; but this shews, that Jesus had been previously appointed for death, however innocent he might be found on his trial. Hence we are to learn,

That Christ, by defending the truth of his doctrine with his hands bound, should teach us, that the truth of the Gospel is to be maintained by words, and not with the sword. This method of maintaining and propagating religion cannot plead the example of Jesus, the Author of our faith, and founder of the Christian Religion. He would not allow his disciple, Peter, to use the sword in his defence. And when he himself defends his doctrine, his sacred hands are bound, and the only weapon he uses in bearing witness to the truth, is the tongue. It is therefore the characteristic of a false religion, and the sure sign of an Antichristian spirit, to use violence to propagate its doctrines, and compel others to embrace it by force.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living Saviour! praised be thy holy name for thine unparalleled patience, in bearing all the injuries, affronts, and barbarous indignities, inflicted on thee by cruel men. Instead of ignominy and contempt, thou art entitled to all honour, adoration, and esteem, as the express image of the invisible God: But thou hast, for our sake, offered thy sacred and respectable face, before which the very angels veil their faces when dazzled by the effulgence of thy countenance, to be struck, and didst not hide it from shame and spitting; and all this in order to obtain for us grace and boldness, to lift up our heads before God, that we may not be overwhelmed with shame and confusion before his awful tribunal. For this thine amazing condescension, we praise thee from our hearts, and humbly beseech thee, that thou wilt make us willing, for thy sake, to suffer contempt and ill-usage from the world; and even account it our glory, our ornament, and crown, to be made like unto thee, the Firstborn among many brethren.—Grant that we may rather chuse to be despised, smit-

ten, and reviled with thee, than to have for our portion the perishable, sinful honours of the world, which will be followed by eternal shame, and inexpressible misery; and that, after thy great example, we may finish our course with joy. Amen.



CONSIDERATION V.

PETER'S SECOND AND THIRD FALL.

'AND a little while after, as Peter was gone out to the porch, another maid saw him, and said to those that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. Then one said unto him, Art thou not one of his disciples? But Peter denied it again with an oath, Man I am not; I know not the man. And after a while, about the space of an hour, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth, this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilean. Then they that stood by came up, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto, and betrayeth thee. One of the servants of the High Priest, (being his kinsman whose ear Peter had cut off) saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? But Peter began to curse and to swear, and again denied it, and said, Man, I know not what thou sayest: I know not this man of whom thou speakest.' (Matt. xxvi. 71—74. Mark xiv. 69, 71. Luke xxii. 53—60. John xviii. 25, 27.)

In these words are related Peter's second and third fall. This wavering disciple had already denied his Lord and master, and publicly abjured him. As he had once yielded to the temptation, his fall became still greater. Thus it was in the fall of our first parents, which Christ was to expiate by his sufferings. They did not immediately, at the very beginning, sufficiently exert themselves, and vigorously oppose

the tempter ; and therefore, they were gradually more and more entangled in his subtle snare.

I. In Peter's second denial of his master, are mentioned the time when it happened, the manner of the temptation, and the heinous fall which was the consequence of it.

As to the time of this second denial, it is said, ' And a little while after, as Peter was gone out to the porch, another maid saw him.' Thus, according to St. Luke's account, the second denial followed close upon the first. A few minutes after he had denied his master the first time, he heard the cock crow. Now, as our blessed Lord had before told him, that he should deny him thrice, before the cock should crow twice ; it behoved Peter, by the admonition of the first crowing, to recollect himself, to withdraw his foot out of the snare, and guard against any farther temptation. But such was the trouble and perturbation of his mind, that he knew not which way to turn himself. He was very sensible, that he had unwarily thrust himself into a place of extreme danger, and therefore was for getting away from the crowd of soldiers and servants, who stood about the fire. Accordingly, St. Matthew informs us, ' he went out into the porch,' (Matt. xxvi. 71.) i. e. he went towards the gate which opened from the court into the street, in order to steal away unobserved. But so many eyes were fixed upon him, that they prevented his putting his design in execution. The way to the temptation was open to him ; but when he was for making a retreat, every passage was barred and obstructed.

As to the manner of his being assailed a second time, it is thus described in the harmonized accounts of the Evangelists : ' As Peter was gone out to the porch,' i. e. into the court near the outer gate, he was observed, according to St. Mark, by the maid, (namely, she that kept the door) who, from the very first

sight of this stranger, had suspected him, and now, 'began to say to those who stood by, This is one of them.' As if she had said, However he may deny it, I am positive that he is one of Jesus's disciples. Upon this, according to St. Matthew's account, came another maid, who knew him by sight, having often seen him in Jerusalem along with Jesus, 'and said to them that were there, This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth.' Thus Peter had two witnesses against him, who both agreed in charging him with being a disciple of Christ. This again drew the eyes of all who were present upon him; so that they attentively looked him in the face, and according to St. John's account, put the question to him, 'Art not thou one of his disciples? But one of them, as St. Luke observes, after a more particular examination of his face, peremptorily said, 'Thou art also one of them.' This man either knew him better than the rest, or by this affected confidence, attempted to frighten him to a confession, which of course would have set the whole multitude of servants upon him. Thus the number of witnesses against Peter increased; and no doubt every word of the charge brought against him, was a thunder-clap in his ears, and made his timorous, wavering heart tremble.

On this, unhappily succeeded Peter's second fall, which consisted in lies and false oaths. At first it is said, he denied it, and that doubly; for he denied he was a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, in these words, 'I am not;' (Luke xxii. 58. John xviii. 25.) and then he denied that he ever had any knowledge of Christ, in these words, 'I do not know the man.' (Matt. xxvi. 72.) He, who once would not leave his Lord and Master, because he found that he had the words of eternal life, now pretends that he never had any acquaintance with him, or the least knowledge of him. He who formerly had made this glorious confession, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the

living God,' Matt. xvi. 16.) now calls him only a mere man, and publicly denies that he even knows him. But this was not all; for, according to St. Matthew, he confirms this second denial with an oath, because they would not believe him the first time on his bare word. Thus he not only transgressed his master's commandment against swearing unnecessarily; (Matt. v. 33.) but likewise called God to witness a falsehood, wickedly prophaning his awful name, and, as it were, defying his omniscience. Before we proceed to the third denial, we shall make the following observations:

1. Satan violently harrasses timorous souls. He knew how to make the greatest advantage of the temptation he had begun; and having succeeded in discharging his first arrow at Peter, he soon lets fly another, without giving him time for recollection. He would be too crafty for us all, did not a superior eye watch over us, and confound all his black designs for our ruin. This should induce us, when we are unhappily fallen, not to remain a moment in that dangerous state, but immediately invoke the Divine assistance; for otherwise satan takes advantage of this moment to bend his bow a second time, and thus more dangerously wound us.

2. A desire of concealing any sin often causes a greater sin to be committed. Peter, having once pretended that he did not know Jesus, would by no means contradict what he had said. He thought that as he had told one lie, it was necessary to persist in it; otherwise he should not only be ridiculed as a liar, but immediately be apprehended as a disciple of Jesus. This dread of shame and danger, and the desire of concealing his first fault, in which pride had a great share, led him into the commission of a greater; for he not only repeated the false assertion, but added to it a false oath.

3. As light and false swearing is not only forbidden by Christ, but contributed to the augmentation of our Saviour's sufferings, every Christian is obliged carefully to avoid that sin. How must the heart of the blessed Jesus have been pierced, at hearing Peter thus abominably profaning the name of his Heavenly Father, and calling Him, to whom all things are known, as a witness to a manifest untruth? But alas! nothing is more common among nominal Christians than such oaths and attestations, in order to gain credit in the most frivolous affairs, or to confirm lies and falsehood. In every trifle, either the sacred and awful name of God is profaned, or the soul, life, and salvation staked as a pledge. Our blessed Lord, it is true, has also expiated these sins, and obtained pardon for those who sincerely repent of them; but if we would avoid the threatenings annexed to such crimes in the third Commandment, we must abstain from this sinful custom.

II. The second denial was succeeded by Peter's third denial. Here, in the first place, the space of time is again mentioned: 'After a while,' or as St. Luke says, 'About the space of an hour.' so much time, for recollecting and recovering himself from his perplexity, did the long-suffering of God give Peter, before he permitted the third and most violent temptation to assault him. This time allowed him for consideration, he should have bestowed on the salvation of his soul, in repentance, and in fervent prayer to God, that he would draw his foot out of the snare, and open to him a retreat from this dangerous place. But his resolution to wait the issue of his master's trial still detained him there. He likewise grew more secure and confident; and thought, that as he had once cleared himself by a lie, and by the subsequent oath, he should be no longer suspected, and consequently no farther assault was to be apprehended. He therefore, the better to conceal his fear, probably

went back from the porch, and again mingled in the dangerous company of the officers and servants. But when he was most secure, his last fall was nigh at hand. In this interval of an hour, many things had passed with relation to the Lord Jesus. False witnesses had been suborned against him; sentence of death had been pronounced on him; his sacred face had been spit on, and many opprobrious insults offered him. All this Peter, undoubtedly, either heard or saw; and this shocking spectacle he could not behold without the most violent emotions. In the next place, we have an account of the manner of his third assault. He was this time to stand three severe trials.

Of the first it is said, 'One that stood by,' who by the light of the fire had a full view of him, said aloud before all the by-standers, 'That man is a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth; and he not only averred it, but confirmed it with an oath: 'Of a truth, this fellow was also with him;' and as Peter had denied the charge, this man adduces a proof of the truth of it from Peter's country and dialect, 'for he is a Galilean.'

The second expostulation was still the more alarming. For, according to the account given by St. Matthew and St. Mark, the other servants who stood about the fire, laying hold of this proof, pressed him more closely, saying, 'Surely thou art a Galilean, for thy speech bewrayeth thee.' The Galileans, it seems, had a kind of rustic pronunciation, by which they were easily distinguishable from the rest of the Jews; as, in most nations, every province has its particular dialect.

The third assault made the greatest impression on Peter both with regard to the person who accosted him, and the words he made use of. The person was a servant of the High Priest, and a kinsman to Maichus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden. This man by the clear moon-shine, and the great number of torches and lanterns, had a full view of

Peter's face, and retained some knowledge of him. Hence he says, 'Did not I see thee in the garden with him?' By this, Peter was convicted not only of having formerly attended on Jesus, but that the same night, and only a few hours before, he was among his disciples.

This triple attack is followed by Peter's third and most grievous fall, in which three degrees are to be observed. 1. He denied it, 'I know not the man of whom you speak;' or, according to St. Luke, 'Man, I know not what thou sayest.' 2. He confirmed it with an oath, and thus again profaned the sacred name of God; calling on the most just and omniscient being as a witness to his lies and false assertions. 3. He began to curse, or imprecate that God might inflict some signal punishment on him, and renounced his part in the kingdom of God, if he knew this Jesus or was one of his disciples. Thus he loved his life better than his Lord and Saviour, and was more afraid of men than of God and his judgments. Now Peter, according to the Jewish law, might have gone into the court, and given evidence in behalf of the person accused; whereas, instead of this, he not only stays without, but swears, that he does not so much as know the person who stood before the court, and never had any concern with him. The sheep denies his shepherd, who so often had called him by his name. From Peter's third denial we may draw the following inferences.

1. Satan uses all his artifice to render the entrance into temptation easy, and the retreat difficult and hazardous. Peter was at little trouble to get into the High Priest's palace; one single fair word from an acquaintance procured admittance; but when he was inclined to go out again, a multitude of obstacles prevented him. Alas! how easily doth sin allure corrupt man; especially when it promises worldly advantages, and carnal pleasures. We insensibly

contract an intimacy with it ; and practice increases it to a habit : But we find it difficult to extricate ourselves, when we are once entangled in the snares of Satan. Let us lay this to heart, whenever we are enticed to sin. Let us consider the consequence of it ; the remorse of conscience, the anguish and sorrow, which will ensue.

2. It is the nature of sin to gather strength and encrease by continuance. It is like a river which near its source is but a small and shallow stream ; but in its course becomes wider and deeper. This Peter experienced to his great sorrow ; for he gradually sunk deeper and deeper into the temptation. His crime was first a simple denial of his Master, which he afterwards confirms with an oath, and at last curses his own soul to gain the greater credit. This is a terrible instance of the different gradations of sin. Therefore, let not the deceitfulness of sin beguile thee. Art thou unhappily fallen ? hast thou been surprised by sin ? hast thou been drawn away to commit an offence against thy Creator ? rouse thyself without delay, and call upon God to deliver thee out of the snare of temptation.

3. The critical hour of temptation lays open the evil which lurks in the human heart. Peter never thought that he could run such enormous lengths. When our blessed Lord only warned him of his denying his Master, he would not believe him ; much less would he have been persuaded, that he should deny him with oaths and imprecations. On the contrary, he thought he had such a sincere and ardent love for Christ, that he could cheerfully go to prison and to death with him. But the temptation, with which Satan sifted him, manifested the latent depravity of his heart, which was now brought to light like the chaff in a sieve. Possibly many, who read this, may say, "Had I been in Peter's place, I should have showed more courage and resolution, than to

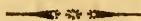
be so shamefully foiled by a servant-maid, so as to deny my Saviour." But to such persons it may be justly answered, 'Thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.' Whoever argues in this manner little knows his own heart; and his strength, in the hour of temptation, will be little answerable to the fond opinion he conceives of it.

4. Peter's crime is still daily committed among Christians. Did Peter break his protestation, that he was ready to go to prison and to death with the Lord Jesus? We have daily instances of many thousands, who in their baptism, or on a sick bed, have vowed to give up their lives entirely to the service of Christ, but afterwards break such pious resolutions and vows. Did Peter deny his Lord and Master? Alas! what is more common than for those who profess him with the mouth, to deny him in their actions? Does not the ambitious man deny his Saviour whose humility was so conspicuous? Does not the glutton, the drunkard, and the lascivious, deny the sober, the chaste, and temperate Jesus? Does not the revengeful and passionate man deny the meek, the mild, and forgiving Jesus? And though all these may make their boast of Christ, and call themselves by his sacred name, yet in reality they say, 'I know not the man.' Was Peter by his pusillanimity and fear of man prevailed upon to tell a lie? What is more common among Christians, than to make use of expressions contrary to the purity of truth? And if Peter, by the extreme danger of his life, was prompted to grievous sins, and surprised by the rapidity of sudden and repeated temptations; many commit the very same sin only for the sake of a fleeting pleasure, or petty advantage; so that if he sunk in a violent hurricane, others are upset by a gentle breeze. What little cause have we therefore to reproach Peter, and think ourselves superior to him! On the contrary, it better becomes us to humble

ourselves before God, and supplicate for his grace, who again received him into favour.

THE PRAYER.

OMNISCIENT and ever-living God, who knowest our hearts better than we do ourselves, and thy sacred Word, hast given a clear testimony of this truth! keep us, we beseech thee, from an overweening opinion of our own strength and sufficiency. May we every moment learn to depend on thee, and to implore thy Almighty aid to secure us from falling into the snares of temptation. Grant, O Lord, that by the example of Peter, and his grievous fall, we may be more cautious, and shun all opportunities that may lead us into sin; and that when we are unhappily fallen, we may fly to thy mercy to raise up again, for the sake of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VI.

THE RECOVERY OF PETER AFTER HIS FALL.

‘AND immediately, while Peter yet spake, the cock crew the second time. And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter: And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.’ (Mat. xxvi. 74, 75. Mark xiv. 72. Luke xxii. 60, 61, 62. John xviii. 27.)

We have hitherto considered Peter's threefold heinous fall, who had extremely wounded his conscience by denying his Master three times successively, and at last confirmed his denial by oaths and imprecations. At present, we shall turn our thoughts

to Peter's recovery from this grievous fall, or rather consider how he was again raised up by his Lord and Saviour. His fall proceeded from his own weakness; but to raise again was beyond his ability.— Here we shall take notice,

First, Of the means by which he was awakened to repentance.

Secondly, We shall consider the signs and fruits of his sincere repentance.

I. As to the means by which he was awakened to repentance, some were external, and others internal. The external were the crowing of the cock, and the piercing look of the Lord Jesus.

As to the former it is said, 'And immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crew the second time.' When Peter had denied his master the first time, he likewise heard the first crowing of the cock. (Mark xiv. 68.) But his mind was at that time so seized with apprehensions of the danger he was in, that it made no impression on it. His conscience was lulled in so profound a lethargy, that it was not awakened by the first crowing of this wakeful bird. But the second crowing of the cock sunk deeply into his heart. He had, as St. Matthew and St. Mark relate this transaction, already began to curse, and to aver with the most terrible imprecations on his own soul, that he was not a disciple of Christ. But the cock by his crowing interrupted him in his impious career. 'While he was yet speaking, the cock crew;' upon which, Peter was immediately struck dumb, put an end to his oaths and imprecations, and now entirely bent his thoughts on getting away from this dangerous place. Had he attended to the first crowing of the cock, and called to mind the words of the Lord Jesus, his fall would not have been so great; and he would not have proceeded from lying to swearing, and from oaths to imprecations. But the consequence of paying no regard to God's

first warning is, that a man sinks deeper into sin, and becomes more entangled in the snares of satan.

The other external cause of Peter's repentance was a significant and penetrating look from the blessed Jesus: 'The Lord turned about, and looked on Peter.' The crowing of the cock was not sufficient to bring him to a sense of his baseness; but it was immediately followed by a look from Jesus, which penetrated into his inmost soul, and awakened his lethargic conscience.

But what imagination is capable of forming an idea of this look of the Son of God, who was the express image of his Father? Though an affectionate and benign, and at the same a majestic, sweetness beamed forth from the eyes of the Lord Jesus at other times; yet there was something extraordinary in this piercing look, which had such a wonderful effect on Peter's heart. What strong emotions did the blessed Jesus express in this look! A compassionate love mixed with grief, and an ardent desire of reclaiming his disciple, shot from the eyes of the Son of God; and in this look, an effulgent beam of divine grace darted into Peter's benighted soul. Though we do not read that our Saviour, when he looked at Peter, spoke a single word to him, yet Peter saw a multitude of ideas in this expressive look; and, with the utmost confusion, experienced in it his master's unalterable affection to him, notwithstanding his infamous perfidy to his Lord and Saviour. This look of his master, as it were, thus addressed him, "O Simon, Simon! art thou a stranger to this well-known face? How have I deserved this base ingratitude at thy hands, which penetrates and grieves my very soul? Is it not enough, that the traitor Judas has betrayed me? And must I also be so shamefully denied by thee? Where are thy mighty promises, and boasted resolution of going to prison and to death with me? Alas! how soon hast thou forgot all my former kindness, and thy sanguine

protestations !” These, or words of the like import, though he did not hear them with his ears, were loudly proclaimed to him by his conscience, which was now roused and awakened by his master’s piercing look.

These two external means produced an internal motive of repentance ; which was the recollection of our Saviour’s words, by which he had forewarned Peter of this grievous fall. When the cock had awakened his conscience, and an expressive look from Christ had enlightened it, and delivered him from the power of darkness ; his memory presented to him, in large and legible characters, these words of his Lord and master, ‘ Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ With these words, it doubtless occurred to his mind, how injuriously and basely he had then behaved towards the Lord Jesus ; how arrogantly he had set himself above all the other disciples, and what mighty things he had promised, relying on his own strength, yet without making good the very least of his protestations. What a flood of anguish and sorrow must have overwhelmed his soul, at the recollection of the words of Christ ? It is not to be doubted, that the Spirit of grace, at the same time, did not fail to put him in mind of some other consolatory words of Christ ; namely, that he was his Mediator and intercessor, and had prayed for him, that his faith might not fail. These and other comfortable words to the same purpose, were, indeed, the only solace, by which Peter must have been supported under his inexpressible trouble on this occasion, otherwise he had probably sunk into such a dejection of mind, which, like that of Judas, might have plunged him in the abyss of despair ; though there was a wide difference between Peter’s fall and the perfidy of Judas. For if Judas did not swear and curse so profanely as Peter ; yet he committed the horrid crime of betraying and delivering up his mas-

ter; with deliberation and a fixed design: Whereas it was through mere indiscretion and inadvertency, that Peter fell into the danger and the occasion of sinning, of which Satan industriously took advantage, so as to induce him from the fear of death to deny his Master.

But who will say, that there could be remaining in Peter's heart, a secret faith in Christ, since he went so far as to deny him. St. Paul closely connects the confession of the mouth with the faith of the heart, in these words: 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' (Rom. x. 9, 10.) How then can a true faith in Christ be consistent with a denial of him? Does not such an assertion separate those things which God hath joined together? Therefore Peter's faith was absolutely extinguished by this tempest; but by the gracious look of Jesus Christ it was re-kindled, and ever after blazed in a constant and pure flame. This grace Christ had previously obtained for Peter at the divine tribunal, and at the same time, had assured him of it: Behold, said our blessed Lord, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, (Luke xxii. 31, 32.) and by that means forever to deprive you of faith and salvation. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, nor be irrecoverably stifled forever. 'And when thou art converted,' and by true repentance art again received into that state of grace from which thou art fallen, strengthen thy brethren.'

Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. It is a particular favour of God, when he calls a second and third time to a soul, which has once heard his awakening voice. Peter instead of attending to the crowing of the cock, which should have brought him to reflection, let it pass unheeded like a common sound; yet the indulgent Providence of God permits him to be admonished, and summoned to repentance, by the same alarming incident. O the

wretched folly of those, who abuse this goodness of God, and make light of the first invitations and admonitions of his compassionate love, calling them to repentance! This fatal neglect usually proceeds from a notion, that their present circumstances will not allow of entering on the arduous work of repentance; that these awakenings and friendly motions will be followed by others; that God will bear with them sometime longer: and as they are not without a purpose of being converted, they flatter themselves that he will always keep open for them an access to the Throne of Grace. Alas! how imprudently do such people act! for in such a case the heart not only becomes more and more hardened and enured to sin, but God, when his first inviting and gracious call is slighted, generally accompanies his subsequent calls with sensible chastisement; which might have been avoided by an early compliance with his first invitation. Let every one, therefore, commune with his own heart, and reflect on the frequent summons to repentance with which God has favoured him in the course of his life; and how, on several occasions, and by frequent intervals, they have been moved, and as it were, touched to the quick. If all these intimations be neglected, the heart is in the utmost danger of being finally hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

3. Our indulgent and merciful Saviour turns towards a sinner, even before the sinner turns to him. Before Peter looked on Christ with eyes overflowing with tears, Christ looked on Peter with eyes full of pity and compassion, and turned to him his benign countenance, while he turned his back on his slighted Lord. Thus it daily happens. Grace prevents the wretched sinner; and, by a penetrating, affectionate glance, touches his depraved heart, and offers him an assisting hand, while he is still lying in the mire of sin. Therefore, let none plead, that it is out of his power to convert himself: for to make the first

advances is not required of him, but only that he will not reject preventing grace, when it kindly looks on him in his misery ; and if he only allows it admission into his heart, it there begins, carries on, and completes the work of conversion. O that men, amidst the croud of earthly and idle thoughts, would better attend to the gracious voice of God, daily calling them to repentance, by his spirit, word, and ministry.

4. The eyes and ears are the two chief inlets through which life and death make their way into the soul. Through these, death entered into the soul of our first progenitors, and from them hath been continued on all their descendants. They looked on the forbidden tree, and listened to the delusive remonstrances of the tempter. For want of carefully securing these avenues, the fort, which is otherwise impregnable, is entered and taken. St. Peter's fall was likewise owing to a fatal curiosity of indulging these senses. He was for seeing what would be the event ; and on hearing himself successively and publicly charged, by several persons, of being a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, his soul was seized with that dread of death, which extinguished his faith. But through the same inlets, by which spiritual death had made its way into his mind, the divine life again also insinuates itself. His ears are pierced with the crowing of the cock, awakening him to repentance ; and his eyes meet the gracious glance from Jesus Christ, by which the extinguished flame of his faith is re-kindled.

5. Our merciful High Priest helps the weakness of our memory, and, in a proper season, puts us in mind of his words. The expressive look from our blessed Lord refreshed and enlightened Peter's memory ; so that he thought of his Saviour's words, and called to mind the warning which Christ had given him. Thus the word of God, like seed buried in the earth, often lies buried in the memory for a time, without producing any salutary effect ; but af-

terwards becomes the cause of repentance and conversion, when our blessed Saviour, by his spirit, again puts the sinner in mind of it.

II. The signs and fruits of Peter's repentance, are likewise mentioned in the text cited above.—What passed inwardly in his heart, the Evangelists have left to our own reflection; but they have specified the external signs, which evidenced the truth of Peter's repentance. With regard to these signs, the three following particulars occur in the Gospel.

1. Peter quitted the High Priest's palace, and with it the tempter's snare, and the occasion of his fall. He could not think of continuing a moment longer in the place, where he had so basely denied his Lord and Saviour. Perceiving that the blessed Jesus, whom he had so grievously injured was still his friend, the sight of his Master's enemies grew insupportable to him. He therefore hastened away, and broke from them abruptly; and as soon as he was irradiated by the light of our Saviour's countenance, would have no farther fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, which were going forward in this congregation of the wicked. As he was now resolved to get away from this prison of Satan, in which he had voluntarily suffered himself to be shut up, God was pleased to open a way for him to escape; so that he went away without any hindrance or molestation. Here he stood in need of the safe conduct, which Christ had procured for his disciples before he was seized, by saying unto his enemies, 'If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.'

2. He covered his face; for that is the proper sense of the Greek word here used by St. Mark: he cast, or drew one of the ends of his upper garment over his head, with which he covered his face; as was usual with mourners, or persons under affliction, that they might not see, or be seen by others. (2 Sam. xv. 80. xix. 4. Jer. xiv. 3, 4.) By thus covering his face, he shewed both his grief and shame for

what was past ; but this shame was not sufficient. For as he had openly denied Christ, he should have publicly recanted his denial ; and as he had not been ashamed of sinning, he ought not to have been ashamed of acknowledging his sin, and of making some amends for his fault. But now, he was excused from this. He had no occasion at present to go with Christ to prison and to death, but only to repent in secret, and wait for the divine assistance. But afterwards, when he came to be annointed with the Holy Ghost, he made ample compensation for his timidity and weakness. As he had now thrice denied his Master in Caiaphas's house, where the whole Sanhedrim was assembled ; so he afterwards three several times professed Christ with great boldness and courage, even in the presence of the same council. (Acts iv. 9, 12, 19, 20. v. 29—92.) He then not only intrepidly appeared with open face ; but also exposed his naked back, and with joy received the stripes, which were inflicted on him by order of the Sanhedrim for his resolute confession of Jesus Christ. (Acts v. 40, 41.)

5. He gave a free vent to his tears : 'He went out and wept bitterly.' The anguish of his heart was too violent to be any longer suppressed ; but it burst forth like a torrent, and vented itself in tears. These tears proceeded both from sorrow and a tender love for his Lord and Master, whom he had so basely denied ; so that from this rock, Peter, the water of repentance gushed ; which was not struck with Moses's rod, but by a powerful and affectionate look of the Lord Jesus. The sincerity of Peter's repentance afterwards shewed itself by the abundant fruits, which it produced : For he never after relapsed into the like fault ; but boldly, and even to death, professed the faith of Jesus Christ. Hence we may observe,

1. That the first sign of a real conversion is the forsaking all wicked company. Thus Peter shewed the sincerity of his repentance ; for, instantly, and

without delay, he withdrew from that wicked company, which had occasioned his unhappy fall. If the wicked will not leave us, when we say with David, 'Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,' (Psalm vi. 8.) we must leave them, and without any procrastination, avoid and fly from the occasions of sinning. It behoves every one, therefore, to ask his own heart, Whether he is entangled in such acquaintance, from whom, he is abundantly convinced, he is so far from reaping any manner of benefit, that they are an extreme detriment to his peace of mind? and whether, notwithstanding such a conviction, he has the courage manfully to declare for his Lord and Saviour, and extricate himself out of this snare of Satan? Alas! it is notorious, that this is one of the most common obstacles to the conversation of a sinner. The conversation of such persons stifles all the successive workings of grace in a well inclined mind, and makes it averse to serious thoughts. Let no one excuse himself, and say, I cannot quit such company, though I sincerely design it; for he may be assured, that as God opened a way to Peter to escape, as soon as he was really inclined to withdraw himself from the contagion; so will he shew the like kindness to him, and assist his endeavours with his all-sufficient grace.

2. As Peter was received into favour and obtained pardon and forgiveness, no sinner ought to despair of mercy. A Christian, who has the strongest faith and resolution, may be alarmed at Peter's fall: but Peter's repentance may inspire the most wretched sinner with comfortable hopes of acceptance with God. That merciful hand, which was held out to this sinking Apostle; stopped him short amidst the most terrible imprecations; and snatched him from perdition; can also lay hold of thee, O desponding sinner, and draw thee out of the mire of sin, that thou sink not. Peter's repentance should therefore be an efficacious balsom of life and comfort to every wounded conscience, every troubled and dejected mind, which

begins to have a sense of the greatness of its sins, and sees into what an abyss of misery it has plunged itself. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, who rescued this wandering sheep from the jaws of the infernal lion, that seeketh whom he may devour, can, and will, deliver every soul that earnestly implores his aid; for it redounds to the glory of his grace to wrest from Satan's hold a great sinner, who seems lost beyond all hope; to change his obdurate heart; and to display the wonders of mercy and redeeming love, in rescuing his soul from destruction. This instance of Peter's reception into favour may afford the greater comfort and joy to all wounded and terrified minds, if they reflect that our blessed Saviour, when he conversed with Peter after his resurrection, never upbraided him with his heinous fall. He no sooner had bewailed his baseness and recovered from his fall, but his merciful Saviour permitted the whole transaction to be buried in oblivion, and received him again into favour. Thus, O repenting sinner, shalt thou also partake of his free mercy, if thou wilt only suffer his grace to descend into thy heart. Thy former profligate life, and heinous transgressions shall be eternally forgotten; they shall not be objected against thee at the tribunal of God; they shall be cast into the depth of the sea, so that they shall never rise up in judgment against thee. For this end has thy compassionate Mediator caused Peter's repentance to be recorded in the history of his sufferings, that thou mightest thence know the salutary fruits and effects of his passion, and avail thyself of them to thy comfort and salvation. Arise immediately from thy fall; thy Saviour is willing and ready to help thee. Confer not long with flesh and blood; but hasten to deliver thy soul. Fly from wicked company; avoid every occasion of sinning; obstruct not the influence of divine grace, which will produce in thee shame and contrition, repentance and godly sorrow, and will soften thy stoney heart, and make it a fountain of sa-

lutory tears. Go out and weep bitterly, that thou hast denied the Lord that bought thee: Hope in his grace, though thou hast deserved only his wrath and the displeasure of God; and then be assured that in this hope thou shalt not be disappointed.

THE PRAYER.

O BLESSED Jesus, faithful and adorable Saviour! we praise thee for the glorious example of thy mercy, which thou hast shewn to thy fallen disciple Peter, for the comfort and support of all repenting sinners in all succeeding generations to the end of the world. Praised be thy name, who, in the midst of thy ignominy and ill-treatment when the sentence of death was passed on thee, didst not forget thine unhappy fallen disciple, and, by a look expressive of thy pastoral care and tenderness, didst recall this strayed sheep from his devious wanderings. We believe, O blessed Jesus, that in thy exalted state of glorification, thou still retainest the same affectionate love and compassion towards the meanest and most dejected sinner, as in the days of thy humiliation and sufferings. Be pleased to irradiate our hearts with this thy loving kindness; and let this example make such a deep impression on our minds, as may inspire us with hope in thy mercy, and preserve us from sinking into despair. Look upon us with an eye of pity and compassion, when we are unhappily fallen; and visit us with thy grace, that we may return into the way of salvation. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VII.

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE LORD JESUS DURING
THE UNJUST PROCEEDINGS OF THE
SANHEDRIM, OR GREAT COUN-
CIL OF JEWS.

‘NOW the chief Priests and Elders, and all the Council, sought false witness against Jesus to put

him to death ; but found none. Yea, though many bare false witness against him, their testimony agreed not together. At the last came two false witnesses, and bare false testimony against him, saying, We heard him say, I am able to [I will] destroy this temple of God that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. Then the High Priest arose and stood in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace and answered nothing.' (Matt. xxvi. 59—63. Mark xiv. 55—61.)

These words exhibit to us the behaviour of the Lord Jesus during the unjust proceedings of the Sanhedrim. In which we shall

First, Consider the iniquitous proceeding of that assembly.

Secondly, Christ's behaviour on that occasion.

I. Previous to the former, let us consider the persons who concurred in the guilt of those unjust proceedings; and these were the chief Priests, the Elders, and the whole Council. The members of the Sanhedrim or great council, who were very numerous, and constituted both the ecclesiastical and civil polity of the Jews, were now assembled in the High Priest's palace to assist at Jesus's trial, and to pronounce sentence of death on him.

It may be thought somewhat strange, that the whole council should meet at so late and unseasonable a time of the night in the palace of the High Priest, and that they did not appoint a select committee for conducting their designs. But this was, in the first place, to make the people believe, that the passing sentence on Jesus of Nazareth was an affair of the highest necessity and importance, which required the presence of the whole council, and that the members of it, foregoing their natural rest, should, in a very extraordinary manner, and contrary to the established cus-

tom, sit in the night, because the affair would not admit of any delay. Another motive probably was, that Pilate, the Roman governor, might conceive a higher idea of the importance of the trial; and the more readily be induced to order the execution of a sentence, which had been unanimously passed on Jesus by such an august assembly, and at such an extraordinary hour. Such are the pretences with which the prince of this world, to this very day, imposes on the unthinking multitude. When he has by his evil suggestions deluded and misled councils, convocations, synods, &c. to condemn real goodness; to pronounce truth to be error, and true piety a new sect and dangerous heresy, he can be at no loss to bring superficial minds over to his party. They think that councils have proved at large such and such doctrines and positions by their solemn decrees; and that persons of such great learning and knowledge would not give a sanction to such things, without going on certain grounds. Ought not more credit to be given to a whole assembly, whose members are not only judges of the affair, but have also maturely weighed all the arguments pro and con, than to a few individuals, who judge partially of things? These are the inferences of the undiscerning multitude, when Satan strikes a blow at the kingdom of Christ. But the ever-glorious son of God suffered himself to be sentenced to death by this august and venerable assembly, that he might expose and baffle these machinations of the spirit of darkness, which he carries on by means of the outward pomp, authority, and dignity of men. For who will now be dazzled by power, titles, and high station, so as to acquiesce in the decrees of men, when the most innocent person that ever appeared in the world has been condemned to die as a blasphemer, by the unanimous voice of a very respectable and learned assembly of lay men and ecclesiastics. Such were the persons who incurred the guilt of this iniquitous sentence.

We shall now consider, in the next place, the unjust proceeding itself. Here is indeed an appearance, as if every thing was transacted in a regular, just, and legal manner: for the method prescribed by the law of Moses is observed in the trial, and, conformably to that law, witnesses are heard. Moreover, though the law required but two or three witnesses for pronouncing sentence of death on a person convicted of capital crimes, against which such a punishment was denounced, (Deut. xvii. 6.) they went beyond this injunction, and produced multitudes of witnesses, who accused the holy Jesus, the Son of God, of the most heinous crimes. But these witnesses were the most abandoned of men, hardened against all sense of shame. For some of their depositions were utterly false; and by others, they perverted the true and innocent meaning of the words of the Lord Jesus, and maliciously put a criminal construction upon them. In these proceedings we may observe a two-fold injustice.

As to the former, we shall take notice of the means which this council made use of; their drift in employing those means; and lastly, the unsuccessful issue of this contrivance.

1. As to the means, which the council made use of in carrying on this flagrant injustice, we are informed, that 'the whole council sought false witness against Jesus.' Undoubtedly they must either have bribed some profligate wretches to accuse Jesus of the worst of crimes; or, others, in order to gain the favour of the members of the council, (as it conduced to profit and preferment) voluntarily offered themselves, to vent the most notorious falsities against the Lamb of God, and confirm them by a flagitious oath. These false testimonies was probably to be reckoned in the class of necessary lies; the peace, and even the existence, of the Jewish church depended on taking such measures. Those who suborned those false witnesses, at the same time, were not sparing of their

assurances, that all this might be atoned for by a few sin-offerings; and it is not improbable, that the High Priest himself promised these sons of Belial to take the guilt on his conscience, and be answerable for it before God. From such presumptuous beginnings, the Popish clergy have gradually infused a daring hardness into many thousands of weak and timorous minds, and instigated them to the commission of the most execrable sins.

2. Their impious drift, in employing these means, was to put Jesus to death. Their intent in hearing witnesses, &c. was not to come at the truth, and acquit Jesus if he should be found innocent of the charge: On the contrary, they did it with a design of varnishing over that sentence of death, which they had long before determined among themselves to pass on the innocent Jesus, with an appearance of justice. It was their fixed resolution, to rid themselves of this troublesome person, who by his frequent reproofs disturbed their carnal tranquillity, laid open their hypocrisy, and exposed their wicked artifices; insomuch that they had suffered considerably in their credit and esteem with the people, as well as in point of interest. But their real motives for removing Jesus out of the way were, by all means, to be concealed from the people. For this purpose, witnesses were to be suborned to swear all manner of crimes against Jesus, that he might be put to death as a malefactor, who had forfeited his life, being convicted of heresy and sedition. Thus the husbandmen of the vineyard were for delivering up to death the Lord Jesus, who was heir of the vineyard, by the same contrivance as formerly was used against the innocent Naboth; who was put to death at the instigation of the impious Jezebel, who suborned two false witnesses charging him with blaspheming God, and speaking treason against the king; and on this false information he was stoned. (1. Kings xxi. 13. Matt. xxi. 38, 39.)

3. These means, which were contrived to effect so wicked an end, failed in the issue. These wicked suborners of false witnesses were utterly disappointed: for it is said, 'they found none,' i. e. they did not find sufficient evidence, on which they might pronounce sentence of death on the prisoner. Besides, after several false witnesses had given in their evidence on oath, it is added, 'their witness, or testimony, did not agree;' for one contradicted, or related in a quite different manner, what another said before him. Thus God confounded the speech of these witnesses, as he did the language of the projectors of the tower of Babel, and exposed the unrighteous judges to shame and contempt. At this, they ought to have reflected on their own injustice, and considered that God himself blasted their designs, and thwarted their wicked purposes. But when this first attempt proved abortive, the council proceeded to a second contrivance, which is the other part of the two-fold injustice mentioned above.

As to the means made use of in this second instance of injustice, it was the suborning of two witnesses; whose deposition consisted in wresting and perverting the meaning of the innocent words spoken by our Saviour. We observe in the behaviour of these men, that they were hardened in vice, and that their testimony was false.

St. Mark informs us that 'there arose certain, and bare false witness.' From these words some would infer, that these two false witnesses were members of the Sanhedrim; who had hitherto kept their places, but now rose up in order to make their depositions. Thus the High Priest is said afterwards to stand up from his seat, on which, till then, he had been sitting. It is farther said by St. Matthew, 'At last came,' &c. that is, they advanced into the middle of the hall, in order to confront Jesus. They likewise pretended to have heard with their own ears what they were deposing, 'We heard him say;' and consequently af-

firmed, that they were present when our blessed Lord spoke those words, which they construed into such horrid blasphemy.

Having given this instance of their effrontery, they proceed to their false evidence, ‘ We heard him say, I am able to [I will] destroy this temple of God, which is made with hands, and within three days I will build another, made without hands.’ These words allude to what Jesus had said in the beginning of his ministry ; which was, consequently, at least three years before, when he drove those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, out of the temple. What our blessed Lord then said, as recorded by St. John, (John ii. 19.) was this : ‘ Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ These words of the Lord Jesus were most scandalously perverted by these perjured informers : For Jesus therein prophesied of his approaching death, and subsequent resurrection. He shews then, how the temple of his body, in which his divinity dwelt, would be broken and pulled down by death : but that on the third day, by his Almighty power, he would raise it up again, and restore the breathless corpse to life. But this testimony concerning the words which Jesus had formerly spoken, was evidently false in the following particulars :

1. Our blessed Lord’s words were, ‘ Destroy this temple :’ but they pretended that they heard him say, ‘ I will destroy this temple.’

2. The temple which Jesus spoke of was that of his body ; for, no doubt, he pointed with his finger to his breast when he said, ‘ Destroy this temple.’ But they make the words allude to the Jewish temple at Jerusalem ; which, at that time, had been magnificently embellished by the Herodian family.

3. As a further proof that Christ meant the temple at Jerusalem, they add, ‘ that is made with hands ;’ words which never came out of our Saviour’s mouth.

Lastly, They falsely depose, that he said he would build 'ANOTHER temple made without hands.' On the contrary, our blessed Lord's words were 'I will raise it [the same temple which they should demolish,] up in three days.

By thus perverting the words of the blessed Jesus they fulfilled what the Messiah, in the person of David, complains of: 'Every day they wrest, or maliciously pervert my words.' (Psalm lvi. 5.)

But this second attempt to oppress the innocence of our blessed Lord succeeded no better than the former. We find that their testimonies agreed not together. For though they were only two witnesses, yet, we may presume, that as they were heard separately, they probably differed from each other in the circumstances of place, time, &c.

The design of these false witnesses was evidently wicked and malicious. They intended, in the first place to represent Jesus as a vain-glorious boaster, who from an absurd pride, would undertake things beyond the power of men to effect: Thus the Jews had before reproached Christ, saying, 'Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?' (John xi. 20.) But this was not all: by this accusation they charged him with a much greater crime. They would represent him as an enemy to the whole Jewish nation, wheresoever dispersed; since they all acknowledged the temple at Jerusalem as the only place appointed for the public worship of God, and three times a year repaired thither from all parts of the world, to pay their vows to the Lord, to acknowledge their sins and to pour forth their supplications before God; all which devout usages would at once be at an end, if this threatening to destroy the temple were put in execution. They made him likewise, by this assertion, an enemy to the Jewish priesthood, who served by courses in the courts and sanctuary, burnt and offered incense, by sprinkling the blood purified the people of Israel, blessed them and

instructed them in the divine law. Lastly, they designed by this accusation to represent our Lord as a sworn enemy to the God of Israel, who dwelt in the Holy of Holies, or the most sacred part of the temple, and whose Majesty was insulted by this menace to destroy that sacred edifice. In order to make the charge clearer, they call the temple, which Jesus threatened to destroy, the temple of God; by which addition they would insinuate, that the affront was levelled at the God of Israel himself, whose majesty was insulted by speaking contemptuously of his temple. It is not without design that these false witnesses subjoined, that he had farther the boldness to say, he would build another, after he had destroyed the Jewish temple. This contains a malignant charge, that Jesus had formed a scheme to abrogate the temple worship which had been prescribed by God himself, and introduce an idolatrous religion of his own invention. For as these blind slanderers knew nothing of the worship of God according to the new covenant, which, it is true, the Son of God was to introduce; they could think of no other than some idolatrous worship which was to supercede the former that was of divine institution, as this new temple was to be erected on the ruins of the other. Such an accumulation of the worst of crimes is comprehended in the deposition of these false witnesses! However, all the effect of these calumnies and misconstructions was prevented; for the witnesses did not agree. At this the judges were extremely perplexed, seeing that the innocence of Jesus, by its unsullied lustre, broke through the thick clouds of lies and calumnies.—Hence the following doctrines may be deduced.

1. The accusation of our blessed Saviour, by false witnesses, ought to be looked upon as a considerable part of his sufferings. All these persons, by whom the blessed Jesus saw himself surrounded, were so many engines of the devil, the father of lies. This unclean spirit had taken possession of the hearts of the

judges and the witnesses, and instigated the former to condemn him, and the latter to oppress his innocence by false testimonies. Satan's only aim in this was, to fix a blemish on the person and doctrine of Christ, and to disturb the minds of those who believed in him. Thus, these witnesses were one of the things which the infernal serpent was to employ against the blessed seed of the woman. For that our blessed Saviour was not unconcerned at these grievous accusations, but that he had a very painful feeling of them, is evident from his bitter lamentations, long before uttered in the Psalms by the mouth of David, in these words: 'False witnesses did rise up: They laid to my charge things that I knew not; the mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful, are opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue.' (Psalms xxxv. 11. cix. 2.) But what affected his soul more than all the rest, was the horrid profanation of the name of the sacred God, in the oath taken by these two perjured wretches, who swear that they would deliver nothing but the real truth; whereas 'the poison of adders was under their lips.' If St. Paul reckons among the sufferings of Christ the contradictions of sinners, (Heb. xii. 3.) how much more offensive must these false witnesses have been to him, which the father of lies employed as his most venomous arrows. In order to atone for our perjury, lying, and falsehood, the Son of God was to suffer a whole host of false and profligate witnesses thus to rise up against him. But this transcendent merit of Christ belongs to none but true penitents, who are troubled and afflicted, who mourn and weep for the many grievous sins they are conscious of; who, on account of their false testimony, their inadvertent perjuries, their rash and profane swearing, know not how to bear the insupportable burden of sin, and have now an utter abhorrence of all these works of satan. To these, I say, this meritorious suffering of the blessed Jesus is an open city of

refuge, where they shall find safety from the pursuits of the avenger of blood.

2. Never did the innocence of the blessed Jesus shine with greater lustre, than when the lying Spirit used his utmost efforts in obscuring it. In this instance, God confounded some of the enemies of Christ by the means of others, and so perplexed the false witnesses, that, quite contrary to their intentions, they bore testimony to our Saviour's innocence. St. Matthew informs us, that though many false witnesses presented themselves, yet out of them all, not any two agreed in their depositions. For if only two witnesses who agreed in their evidence, could have been procured, sentence would have immediately been passed, according to the law of Moses, which says, 'At the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall the matter be established.' (Deut. xix. 15.) Thus the very contrivances put in practice by satan, for oppressing the innocence of Jesus, were so over-ruled by the wonderful Providence of God, that they served the more to display his innocence, and consequently to bring a greater confusion on satan's instruments. Unquestionably the Son of God saw the hand of his Heavenly Father in this proceeding, which was a powerful consolation to him at this juncture, and animated him to enter on his sufferings with the greater resignation and cheerfulness. Such an High Priest of unsullied innocence, and perfect holiness, in whom no guilt could be found, did our case require. The innocence of our mediator, thus breaking through all false charges, like the sun through the clouds and vapours, must be our shield against the just accusations of the law and our own consciences. Alas ! with what a crowd of witnesses does a sinner find himself surrounded ; when, before the judgment seat of God, he is accused by the law of having offended the Divine Majesty, and wilfully transgressed his commandments ; of having hated God, injured his neighbour, and polluted his body, which ought to

have been the temple of God? Heaven and earth, and all the creatures whom he has abused, by applying them to his wicked purposes, will then witness against him. The places where he committed his abominations, and sinned either alone or in concert with others, will witness against him: 'For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.' (Hebac. ii. 11.) The very members of his body, which he yielded as instruments of unrighteousness, will reproach him for his sins. Then the sinner may say from fatal experience, 'Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me.' (Job x. 17.) Then it is, that he first learns to place a due value on the innocence of Christ, which was so virulently assailed by false witnesses; then he first comes to the knowledge of the transcendent benefit of his meritorious sufferings; and finds that behind this shield only, we can be safe from the accusations of the law, corroborated by the testimonies of so many witnesses. If our benign Mediator interposes; if he invalidates the accusations, by offering to pay our ransom; if he says to his Heavenly Father, 'Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom;' (Job xxxiii. 24.) then the sinner, who already felt the sentence of death in his conscience, is raised to hopes of life and immortality; and by faith triumphing over the terrors of death, may cry out with a holy confidence, "Who shall lay any thing to my charge? It is God that justifieth. Who shall condemn me? It is Christ who, after being unjustly sentenced to be crucified, died and rose again, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, and also maketh intercession for me." (Rom. viii. 33, 34.) Such is the proper and salutary use which we ought to make of this circumstance in our Saviour's sufferings.

In the same manner, when by following Christ we are brought before magistrates for the truth's sake, and there accused by false witnesses who join in

charging us with crimes, of which we know ourselves to be entirely guiltless; we may put our trust, and take comfort in his innocence. Not only Stephen, the first martyr after Christ's death, but many other undaunted professors of his religion, have been made like unto their illustrious head in this particular. This diabolical expedient, the Pagans made use of in persecuting Christians; and by bribing and suborning notorious prostitutes, or by menacing them with the severest torture, prevailed on them to appear in court and depose, That they had been Christians, and frequented the Christian assemblies, where they had seen with their own eyes the debaucheries committed there. These false depositions were immediately entered on record, and copies of them were dispersed through the empire, to raise an abhorrence of the Christians in the breasts of the ignorant and well disposed. In the persecutions raised by the Pope's adherents against the professors of the truth, what atrocious accusations have been likewise brought against the innocent, which were supported by multitudes of suborned witnesses? In such dreadful conjunctures, what an enlivening comfort, what a happy encouragement is it to a member of Christ to reflect, that the most illustrious Captain of his salvation was likewise enured to this kind of suffering, and has obtained sufficient strength for him to come off as conqueror?

2. In considering the behaviour of the blessed Jesus, during the iniquitous proceedings of the Jewish Sanhedrim, or spiritual court, we shall observe,

First, The question put by the High Priest.

Secondly, The silence of our blessed Lord on that occasion.

As for the High Priest's question, it is said, 'Then the High Priest stood.' He arose from his seat full of perturbation, wrath, and pretended zeal: his whole mind being violently agitated: and as he now despaired of procuring a sufficient foundation for convicting Jesus of any capital crime by the deposition of

witnesses, he turned his thoughts on extorting something from our Saviour's own mouth, in order to condemn him. He therefore asked him with great emotion, 'Answerest thou nothing to what these witness against thee?' By this means, he hoped to induce Jesus to answer to these depositions: and either to deny them, or acknowledge himself guilty of the charge. He concluded, that it behoved our blessed Saviour to explain himself on this head: especially as he was accused of open blasphemy against the temple and worship of God. It was the duty of the High Priest to charge it home to the consciences of these perjured witnesses, and to punish them agreeably to the Divine Law; 'If a false witness rise up against any man, to testify against him that which is wrong: the Judges shall make diligent inquisition; and behold if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother: then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done to his brother: So shalt thou put the evil away from among you. Thine eye shall not pity.' (Deut. xix. 16, 18, 19.) On the contrary, the High Priest countenances and protects those witnesses who had deposed such notorious falsities against our blessed Lord, and by his authority supports their groundless evidence, as if it had contained accusations worthy of an answer from the accused.

Secondly, Upon this the Lord Jesus was silent: 'But Jesus held his peace and answered nothing.' Indeed, the witnesses were convinced in their own consciences, that all their depositions put together were but of little weight, and that they could afford nothing to ground a sentence of death upon. As these lying testimonies carried their own confutation with them, and one false witness, by his contradiction, invalidated the depositions of another; the divine wisdom, who well knew when to speak and when to be silent, did not think there was any occasion for him to open his mouth, in order to vindicate his innocence. Thus, his not answering at all implied a sufficient answer to

these incoherent evidences. Besides, they deserved no answer; for they had already judged Christ in their hearts, and suborned these witnesses merely for a show, or rather a mockery of justice. They had before allowed one of the officers of the court to strike Jesus on the face, when he desired that he might be legally convicted by witnesses. He therefore, as it were, wraps himself up in silence; recommends the affair to his Heavenly Father; and with a serene, tranquil mind, patiently waits the issue. As his unrighteous judges had unknowingly fulfilled what had been predicted by the spirit of prophecy, concerning the subornation of false witnesses against the Messiah; so now the Lord Jesus designedly accomplishes what had been foretold by the prophet concerning the Messiah's silence on that occasion, viz. 'As a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.' (Isaih liii. 7.) Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. A person, whose mind is disturbed by any vehement passion, is of all others the most unfit for enquiring after truth. We have observed above, that the High Priest's rising up from his seat was the effect of the agitation of his mind, which did not allow him to sit down calmly during the trial; yet this head of the Jewish clergy would fain arrogate to himself the honour of discovering the truth, as if it depended solely on him; whereas, under this perturbation of mind, he was as unfit for it, as a blind man is to judge of colours. This wretched judge was a true representation of those learned men, who are actuated by the passions of ambition, hatred, anger, &c. and yet would be esteemed oracles, whose words are the standard of truth; who, as Judges, sit on the bench, though they are so blinded by his passion, that they are unable to discern either truth from error or innocence from guilt; who, as Divines, set up to expound the holy Scriptures, and would fain be accounted champions for the pure doctrines of chris-

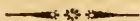
tianity, and yet, from their intemperate zeal, foam and rage more like irrational beasts, than speak and write as it becometh rational creatures ; who as Philosophers, discover new truths, and would be thought promoters of science and virtue, and yet are wretched slaves to their humours and passions.

2. We should never venture on a crime, trusting to a lie : For a lie will confute itself. It is without connection, and built on a sandy foundation. Therefore, whatever evil is spoken of us by others, if it be false, let it never disturb our peace. It is the language of pride, indeed, to object, How ! shall I suffer such calumny ? What will the world think of me ? Would it not be said, that my silence is a confession of my guilt ? Who knows what prejudice it may do my character ? But the meek followers of the mild and lowly Jesus, though they know, that in matters which concern the honour of God, and the order instituted by him, discreet apologies and vindications of the innocent are not prohibited, yet they have also learned to forego their own honour, and in silence and suffering to imitate the Lamb of God, who opened not his mouth. Therefore, when lies and calumnies are so notorious and palpable, as to carry their own confutation with them, they choose rather to be silent, to recommend their cause to God, and patiently to wait for his aid ; and in the mean time, walk on undaunted in their innocence and integrity. They likewise find, that this is the best way to overcome envy, malice, and slander ; for the fire quickly dies away without the addition of fuel to foment it. It is the true Christian's constant maxim in such circumstances : ' I will be dumb, and will not open my mouth, because it is thy doing.' (Psalm xxxix. 9.)

THE PRAYER.

O MOST merciful and gracious Father ! praised be thy glorious name for bringing to light and publicly

manifesting the innocence of thy beloved Son, by the contradictory depositions of his enemies; and for applying his spotless perfection to us as our own, that it may be our defence and shield against the accusation of satan, and our awakened consciences. Bring us to the knowledge and confession of our depravity. Convince us of our guilt, that we may cease from justifying ourselves at thy tribunal, and seek protection under the shadow of our sinless Mediator's wings. May his innocence be our shield and refuge at the hour of death, when the enemy will not fail bitterly to accuse us, to raise up false witnesses against us, and to place before our eyes all the wickedness, which we have actually committed during the whole course of our lives: Then sprinkle our consciences, with the propitiating blood of our Lord and Saviour, so that our accuser may be utterly confounded, and we may depart hence secure of thy favour, and full of a lively hope of eternal felicity. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of the innocence of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



CONSIDERATION VIII.

THE GOOD CONFESSION OF THE LORD JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM, OR SPIRITUAL COURT OF THE JEWS.

‘AGAIN, the High Priest asked Jesus, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God? Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said; I am. Nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’ (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64. Mark xiv. 61, 62.)

In these words, we have an account of the good confession of our blessed Lord before the Jewish

Sanhedrim, or spiritual court, which seems to have been the cause of the subsequent sentence that was passed on him. We may here observe,

First, The cause and occasion of this confession.

Secondly, The confession itself.

I. The behaviour of the High Priest was the occasion of this good confession. We may be sure that this inveterate enemy of Christ was exasperated beyond all patience, when not only his suborning witnesses proved abortive, but also his new expedient of drawing something from the mouth of the party accused, was quite frustrated, by the entire silence of our blessed Saviour. He therefore goes another way to work, and begins to talk to the prisoner in a higher and more resolute tone of voice. He accosts our blessed Lord with a question; to which he adds a solemn adjuration to confess the truth.

The High Priest's question is thus related by St. Mark: 'Again the High Priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed?' The word again alludes to something that had passed before. For the false witnesses being successively heard, and the High Priest being also convinced that, from all their depositions he could not collect a sufficient proof to convict our blessed Saviour of any capital crime; he endeavours to get from his own mouth something on which he might found a charge. With this design, the High Priest asks this question, 'Answerest thou nothing, what is it that these witness against thee?' But Jesus, who saw into the malicious artifice of his judge, would not be induced by this insidious question to break his silence; but at the same time, by making no reply, gave him to understand, that the accusations of the false witnesses did not deserve any answer, as they sufficiently confuted one another.

This stratagem of the High Priest being thus baffled, he accosts the blessed Jesus with another, and indeed a double question; which was immediately

followed by a plain and direct answer. He first asks, 'Art thou the Christ?' i. e. dost thou publicly own thyself to be that Messiah, whom God promised by his servant Moses and the Prophets, and whose coming has hitherto been expected by the Jewish church? His second question is, 'Art thou the Son of the Blessed?' i. e. dost thou pretend to be a person of the same essence with the blessed God, and standing in such near relation to him as that of a son to a father? These Jewish doctors knew, that God, in the writings of the Old Testament, had made mention of his Son. They were well acquainted with that passage in the Psalms, viz. 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.' (Psalm ii. 7.) They knew, that it is farther said in the same divine writings, 'He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father: Also I will make him my first-born.' (Psalm lxxxix. 26, 27.) All this, I say, they very well knew, being persons who were well acquainted with the Old Testament. (Matt. ii. 5, 6.) They likewise very well remembered, that Jesus had given himself out to be the Son of God. For, on restoring sight to the blind man, he asked him this question: 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And when the man demanded, 'Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him? Jesus replied, 'It is he that talketh with thee.' (John ix. 35, 36, 37.) They were also sensible, that he had publicly said, 'I and my Father are one.' (John x. 30.) Accordingly, they had endeavoured to apprehend him when he spoke those words; but he escaped from them, because his hour was not then come. As the rulers had Jesus now in their power, the High Priest again brings on the carpet this critical point, which had given them so much offence; and he is for making the experiment, whether our blessed Lord will acknowledge himself to be the Messiah meant in the above-mentioned passages of the Old Testament, and the Son of God, as he had often pretended that he was. Happy would it have been for

him, if this question had proceeded from a well-disposed heart, a sincere love of truth, and a desire of believing in Jesus if he should appear to be that divine person! But this was an ensnaring question, and designed only to draw a confession from our blessed Saviour, in order to accuse him of blasphemy. The chief Priests, &c. had long since past a decree, that if any man should confess that he was Christ, or the Messiah, he should be put out of the synagogue; (John ix. 22.) and had more than once threatened to stone him, for pretending to be the Son of God. (John viii. 54, 59. x. 30, 31.) Thus it was from an hypocritical, blood-thirsty heart, that this question proceeded; it was designed to pave the way for accusing our blessed Saviour of blasphemy, that they might pronounce the sentence of death, on which they long before resolved, on the Prince of Life.

But this ensnaring question is likewise followed by an hypocritical adjuration; for the High Priest, according to St. Matthew's account, subjoins, 'I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?' The High Priest, probably, apprehended, that the prisoner would on this occasion likewise observe the same cautious silence as before, that no handle might be made of his words. He therefore tried, by a feigned emotion, to touch his conscience, and to bring as it were to the touchstone of a solemn adjuration, and force him to a confession. The High Priest's meaning was this: "If thou hast any regard for the favour of God, I solemnly require of thee, that, without any equivocation, thou will return a direct answer to the question proposed to thee; and plainly declare, whether thou wouldest be accounted the Messiah, and the Son of God? For whatever thou shalt answer to this question will be admitted in this high court, as if it was delivered upon oath." By adjuring our blessed Saviour by the Living God, the design of the High Priest was to shew that he meant the God of Israel, lest the prisoner

should, by a mental evasion, swear by any idol or strange god, and therefore think himself at liberty to deny the truth without incurring the guilt of perjury. This unjust judge had spread his net so artfully, that he was sure of ensnaring the blessed Jesus, whether he answered him in the affirmative, or in the negative.

II. Our blessed Saviour's good confession before the High Priest, is contained in these words:—
'Thou hast said; I am. Nevertheless, I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.'

The Lord Jesus being adjured by the sacred name of his Heavenly Father; the reverence which he bore to it, would not permit him to be any longer silent; so that he now opened his mouth, and gave a satisfactory answer to the High Priest's question. This answer of our blessed Lord includes,

First, A plain and unreserved confession.

Secondly, A farther illustration and confirmation of it.

First, The confession is made in these words, 'Thou hast said.' We read that our blessed Saviour made the same answer to his enemies on two different occasions, during the course of his sufferings. The first was before the Sanhedrim, in the instance before us, when he was asked, Whether he was the Messiah, the Son of God; which answer he repeated (Luke xxii. 70.) the next morning, when this question was again put to him. The second time was before the civil tribunal; for when Pilate asked him, whether he was the King of the Jews, he likewise made this answer, 'Thou sayest.' (Matt. xxvii. 11.) The import of these words 'Thou sayest,' is as if our blessed Lord had said, Yes, it is as thou sayest. Hence St. Mark (chap. xiv. 62.) expresses it thus, 'I am;' i. e. I am the Messiah, foretold and described by the prophets, and whom they have described

as a King, a High Priest, and a Prophet: I am the essential Son of the blessed God.

But this manner of expression is still more emphatical; for it is the same as if our blessed Saviour had said, I am the Christ, or Messiah, and the Son of God, in the very sense you make use of these words in your question. Now, the idea which the High Priest and the Jewish church at that time annexed to this high title The Son of God, was perfectly just; for it included an equality with God; so that he who declared himself to be the Son of God made himself equal with God in honour, majesty, and essential perfections. This is evident from the following passages in St. John's Gospel: 'Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, not only because he had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his father, making himself equal with God.' (John v. 18.) And again, the Jews answered him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God: (chap. x. 33.) Namely, because Jesus had said, I am the Son of God.' (chap. x. 36.) The High Priest, therefore, by asking Jesus whether he was the Son of God, was desirous to know, whether he gave himself out to be a son of God that was equal to the God of Israel in all essential perfections, and, in common with him, every divine attribute, and consequently was to be adored and worshipped in the same manner as the God of Israel.

Upon this, our blessed Saviour answered, 'Thou hast said,' i. e. I do acknowledge myself to be the Son of God; and this not in that low sense in which all believers are termed sons of God, but in that exalted sense in which is signified by this title in your question. Now, this is an invariable maxim in truth and probity, That a judicial question must be answered in the very sense in which the magistrate takes it; otherwise the party interrogated deceives the judge by ambiguous words; a pitiful evasion which

any man of honesty and integrity would scorn to make use of. Therefore it were unjust and sinful to imagine, that our blessed Saviour, who was the true and faithful witness, deviated from this straight path, and had recourse to mean subterfuges on so solemn an occasion. Besides, it evidently appears that the High Priest actually took Christ's answer in this sense, viz. that he was not merely a nominal Son of God as faithful Israelites were, but essentially the Son of God and equal with his Father, from his behaviour as soon as he heard our Saviour's answer.—For he rent his clothes, and cried out, as it were, in phrenzy, 'He hath spoken blasphemy: what farther need have we of witnesses?' With this we may compare another passage, (John x. 36.) were our blessed Saviour was before accused of blasphemy on the same grounds, namely, for having declared himself the son of God. Hence it incontestably appears, that the High Priest from this confession concluded, that Jesus, whom he looked on as a mere man, arrogated to himself, under the title of the Son of God, the Divine Essence, and exalted himself in idea to the throne of God. Therefore this confession of the Lord Jesus is particularly remarkable, as, on one side, it darts a thunderbolt which roots up Socinianism from its very foundation; and, on the other hand, corroborates our faith, which acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth, who by the sentence of the Jewish Sanhedrim was crucified, to be the essential Son of God, whom all created beings are bound to honour as they do the Father.

Secondly, To this good confession, the Lord Jesus further adds an illustration and confirmation of it, in order, not only to place his words in a clear light, and set their true and genuine sense out of all question, but likewise to confirm his divine Sonship by irrefragable proofs. For undoubtedly it must have appeared to the High Priest as the height of extravagance, for a poor criminal, who stood before him,

to pretend to be not only the Messiah and the king of Israel, but also the Son of God. Hence our blessed Lord confirms this truth by the two following proofs.

The first is from his sitting at the right hand of God, and is contained in these words, 'Hereafter shall ye see the son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power.' Here Jesus refers his judge to the book of Psalms, (Psalm cx. 1.) 'The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand.' This is here termed by our Lord, the right hand of Power; as the scripture attributes an infinite power or omnipotence to the hand of God. The Supreme Being is frequently represented, in the Old Testament, sitting on a lofty throne, and, as a king, ruling over all. (2. Chron. xviii. 18. Isaiah vi. 1. Psalm xcix. 1.) Now when Jesus says he shall sit at the right hand of God, this can mean nothing else but that he shall reign jointly with his Almighty Father; and have a share in the accomplishment of his decrees, the economy of his government, and the conquest of his enemies. He was to sit at the right hand of Power; or, as St. Matthew expresses it, (chap. xxviii. 18.) 'to Him all power was to be given in heaven and on earth.'

The second proof is taken from his returning in the clouds; for our blessed Lord adds, 'And coming in the clouds of heaven.' Here he refers his judge to this passage in the prophet Daniel: (chap. vii. 13, 14,) 'I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him.' The clouds of heaven are represented in scripture as God's chariot, on which he conveys himself with incredible swiftness wherever he intends to display his glory, either in punishments and visitations, or in rewards, and acts of benevolence. Hence it is said in the Psalms, (Psalm civ. 3.) 'He maketh the clouds

his chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind. Behold, the Lord rideth on a swift cloud, and shall come unto Egypt,' saith the prophet. (Isaiah xix. 1.) God permits no created being to use these majestic chariots, reserving them particularly to himself. Now the Son of Man, by appropriating to himself these chariots, and assuring the Jews that he should hereafter be seen coming in the clouds of heaven, gives them to understand, that he is the Son of God in such a sense, as in honour and dignity to be equal to his Father.

But when our blessed Saviour here speaks of coming in the clouds of heaven, he does not allude to his triumphant ascension thither, when he was taken up in a white effulgent cloud, and carried to God's throne. But he speaks of his coming forth from the Father, to manifest his great glory. Nor does he speak only of his coming to the last judgment, when his glory will be displayed in the most conspicuous manner, and when he shall judge and condemn those who have impiously condemned him. He rather means here his coming on various occasions, from the time of his exaltation to the right hand of God, until the end of the world; and especially his coming to enlarge his kingdom, and abolish the Jewish polity. Of this coming he even speaks as an event, which some of his hearers would live to see. (Matt. xvi. 28. Luke ix. 27.) Therefore the meaning of these words of our blessed Saviour is this: I stand, indeed, at present before your tribunal like an accused malefactor, and my Divinity must submit to answer your presumptuous queries; but in a short time, even in this my debased, vilified human nature, will I sit on the throne of God; will take in hand the government of my church, send down my Holy Spirit, extend my kingdom over the whole world, and execute on your devoted city and church, those judgments, which God has long since determined to pour upon them.

In this illustration and confirmation of our Saviour's confession, three particulars are farther to be observed.

1. That he does not here call himself the Son of Man out of mere humility, as if the title of the Son of God did not of right belong to him in his state of abasement, and he was not to assume it till after his exaltation. On the contrary, Jesus here directs the attention of his judge to the mystery of his person, by assuring him that the abased Son of Man, who now stood bound before him, was likewise the real Son of God. Thus Peter, though at present he denied the Lord Jesus time after time, formerly made a glorious confession of his dignity. For when Christ asked that apostle, saying, 'Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' Peter answered, 'Thou art Christ the Son of the living God;' (Matt. xvi. 13, 16.) and such the Mediator betwixt God and man must be. He must be man, that he may be capable of suffering; and God, in order to impart an infinite value to his sufferings: He must be man to humble himself down to the earth, and God to raise us up to heaven; man, that he may represent mankind, and stand in their stead; and God, that he may reconcile and propitiate the justice of God, by a proportionate satisfaction: But he must be God and man in one person, that he may unite God and man in one spirit.

2. It is to be observed that Jesus says, that the Jews should see him 'sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' In this passage, seeing signifies perception in general, or being sensible of a thing; as to see death (John viii. 51.) signifies to taste of death, and feel its sting. However, the Jews even with their bodily eyes saw the wonderful effects of the exaltation of Jesus Christ; from which they might be abundantly convinced, that He whom they had sentenced to death as a blasphemer, was sitting on the throne of God. They saw at the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day⁹ of

Pentecost, lambent flames of fire, resembling tongues, resting on the heads of the apostles. They saw with astonishment, the boldness thence derived, with which the apostles, now so timorous and faint-hearted, openly confessed Christ before the council and civil power. (Acts iv. 13, 30, 33.) They saw the many miracles which the apostles wrought in the name of Jesus, in confirmation of the testimony they bore to his resurrection. (Acts v. 12, 15, 16.) They saw the great change wrought by the preaching of the apostles in the minds and dispositions of so many thousands of Jews, and multitudes of heathens, who were turned from idolatry to the God of Israel. They saw the Roman legions, and Imperial eagles, besieging and destroying their holy city. These were all visible effects of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God; from which they might evidently perceive, how transcendent must have been the dignity of the person, whom they had injured and despised.

3. We may observe that the Lord Jesus says, 'that they should see these things hereafter.' In a few days, the foundation for all these great events was to be laid. Even on the very day of our Saviour's crucifixion, they saw such astonishing phenomena as was never heard of before: for the sun was obscured, so that the noon-day was as dark as midnight; the veil of the temple was rent in twain; the earth trembled, the rocks rent, yawning graves cast out their dead, and all nature seemed affected. These wonders so terrified even a Roman Centurion who attended the execution, as to extort from him this confession: 'Truly this was the Son of God.' (Matt. xvii. 54.) Three days after this, they were informed of Christ's resurrection from the dead; forty days after that, they had an account of his ascension; and on the fiftieth day, they saw the effects of it in the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the public preaching of the apostles in all languages. Thus from the very crisis of our Saviour's lowest abasement,

his Divine glory daily displayed itself more and more in a visible and most surprising manner.

From this good confession of our blessed Lord, let us by way of conclusion, deduce the following inferences.

1. Truth ought to be confessed, though at the same time great inconveniences, and even the loss of life, were known to be the consequence of it. This is the pattern set before us by Jesus Christ, the chief of all martyrs, and the supreme witness of truth.— He was very sensible of the consequences of this noble confession, viz. that he should be buffeted, mocked, and spurned; and that even the sentence of death would be passed upon him. Nevertheless, he declares the truth; professes that he is Christ, the Son of God, and this at a time when Peter publicly said, that he knew not the man. By this noble and public confession, he has atoned for our mean fear of man, and our unseasonable timidity, which so often withhold us from confessing the truth of his religion; and has acquired for us strength and resolution undauntedly to profess the truth even unto death, and to seal it with our blood.

2. The blessed Jesus in the presence of his very murderers, who were going to pronounce the sentence of death upon him, with a calm intrepidity acknowledges himself the Son of God, who should shortly sit on the right hand of Power; and this confession of his divinity he seals with his blood. Let us then carefully consider this good confession of Jesus Christ; and pray to God that the proofs, with which it is accompanied, may so irradiate our souls, that whatever doubts may remain concerning this great truth may be dispersed like mists and vapours before the morning sun.

3. Those who will not believe, that Jesus Christ is a person of transcendant power and glory, will be made to feel it by fatal experience. The Jews of that age refused to believe, that Christ was the Son of

God; and therefore it is foretold to them, that they should soon see and experience it: for in less than forty years after, such a series of calamities overtook them, to make them sensible of the power and dignity of the person they had despised, rejected, and murdered. Alas! how terribly glorious will the appearance of the Son of God be at the last day to those, who have not performed that service which his dignity and glory required of them; who have denied him their hearts, and have refused to obey all his commands without exception? That we may not have such a fatal experience of the glory of Jesus Christ, let us believe in his name; so that through him we may acquire the noble privilege of becoming the sons of God, and co-heirs of his glory.

4. He that is a partaker with the despised Son of Man, in his abasement and sufferings, shall also partake of glory. Thus whoever is not ashamed of Christ, and follows him in this perverse and adulterous generation, of him the Son of God will not be ashamed; but will own him in the presence of Angels before his Father. And though he cannot partake with Christ of the honour of sitting at the right hand of God, this being the peculiar privilege of the only begotten Son of the Father; yet shall he set on the throne of Christ, (Rev. iii. 21.) and be made a happy partaker of his glory, as far as he is susceptible of it. And if in the day of the Lord he be found alive, he shall, together with those who have slept in the Lord, be taken up in the clouds, the chariots of God, even those thousands of triumphant cars, which God shall send to attend his Son; and in them shall he meet the Lord in the air; (1 Thess. iv. 17.) and thus shall he be brought home to his Heavenly Father's house, there to be forever with the Lord.

5. As the divine glory of Jesus Christ is terrible to his enemies; so is it highly consolatory to his faithful friends and servants. This confession of Jesus Christ contained in it a secret menace for it was made

before his enemies; and still it is pregnant with dreadful threatenings against the wicked and profane. For what have they to expect from this their future judge but a severe and terrible sentence, who have not only denied him the honour and worship due to him; but on the contrary, given themselves up, soul and body to the service of Satan, his inveterate enemy, by working all manner of unrighteousness? If the wicked, according to the book of Wisdom, will be struck with terror that day at the exaltation of the children of God; if when they shall see them in their transcendent glory they will cry out, 'groaning for anguish of spirit, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach: We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is amongst the saints?' Alas! with what infinitely greater agonies will their consciences be seized, when they see the unsupportable glory of the only begotten Son of God, when he shall come with amazing pomp, and all his holy angels with him. What dreadful emotions will this dazzling splendor excite in their minds? It will penetrate like a flash of lightning into the inmost recesses of their souls, and throw them into an irrecoverable confusion, and enduring agonies of mind. If the manifestation of the glory of Christ will be thus terrible to all the wicked and impenitent, it will be no less comfortable to his real disciples. They will, even in this life, be convinced of the infinite efficacy of his sufferings, when they reflect, that Christ, the anointed of the Lord, the only Son of God, has for our sake poured out his soul unto death; and shall not the blood of the Son of God cleanse us from all sin? (1 John i. 7.) By this consideration, they will not only be serene in all dangers, but be comforted even in death. For, what should they fear, when they know that he who sitteth at the right hand of Power, who is raised to his Father's throne, to whom the clouds of Heaven

are a chariot, is their friend and protector? What motive have they to dread the day of his appearance, when they consider that the patron, the friend of mankind, even he who vouchsafed to call himself their brother, will be their judge? Let us then endeavour by the light of the holy Spirit, to attain to a true knowledge of Jesus Christ. Let us pour forth our prayers to God, that at the hour of death, he will give us a sight of his glory. The first martyr, Stephen, died with joy, when he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts vii. 55.) Thus we also shall be able to depart from hence with confidence and joy, if we have a lively knowledge of this glory to which Jesus Christ is exalted, and a lively hope that we shall be made partakers of his glory.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living God, we bless thy glorious name for giving up thy beloved Son to be judged by the wicked, that we might not come into eternal judgment, and be sentenced to everlasting death. We also praise thee, O Son of the Father, for that good confession that thou made before this unrighteous tribunal : when as a sworn witness, thou didst acknowledge the truth of thy divine glory to the face of thy blood-thirsty judges, and didst thereby lay the corner-stone of our faith, so that it cannot be moved. Make such a deep impression of this truth on our souls, that it may never slip out of our minds. Irradiate our hearts with a beam of thy glory, and cause it to strike a salutary terror into all secure minds, who go on in their impenitence, denying thee, and refusing to worship and obey thee. By this confession of thy dignity, strengthen and comfort thy true disciples and followers, in all the dangers and sufferings they are to undergo for thy sake. Make them sensible that thou sittest at the right hand of Power, and that thy arm is not shortened to help

them, and deliver them out of all their troubles.— Hear us, O Lord, and, by thy good confession, give us resolution likewise to confess thy name before men, and to follow the even to sufferings and to death. Amen.



CONSIDERATION IX.

THE SENTENCE PASSED ON JESUS CHRIST, AFTER HIS CONFESSION.

‘THEN the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy; What farther need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: What think ye? They all condemned him, and answered and said, He is guilty of death.’ (Matt. xxvi. 65, 66. Mark xiv. 63, 64.)

In these words is related the condemnation of the Lord Jesus, which immediately followed his confession. Here we may observe,

First, The charge on which the sentence of death is grounded.

Secondly, The false gloss put upon this accusation in order to gain it the more credit.

Thirdly, The sentence of condemnation.

I. The charge or accusation, on which the sentence of death was grounded, is contained in these words: ‘Then the High Priest said, He has spoken blasphemy.’ Blasphemy is a sin of the deepest dye, as it is committed immediately against the Divine Majesty. Now, God may be blasphemed either directly, or indirectly. When this all-glorious Being is spoken of with contempt and mockery, and profane blasphemous words are uttered against him, this is direct blasphemy. But when any thing unbecoming or absurd, is imputed to the Divine Majesty; or when a man arrogates to himself what properly belongs to the Supreme Being, and consequently in-

communicable to any creature ; it is nothing less than indirect blasphemy. In the latter sense our Mediator, according to the perverse judgment of his enemies, had blasphemed God ; since he made himself to be the Son of God, as they afterwards reported the matter to Pilate, (John xix. 7.) and consequently robbed the God of Israel of his honour, by sharing it with Him, who had expressly said, ‘I will not give my honour to another.’ (Isaiah xlii. 8.) This horrid accusation was the effect of extreme blindness and ignorance, increased by the clouds of passion ; so that, as St. Paul says, ‘They knew not the Lord of Glory.’ (1 Cor. ii. 8.) For the High Priest looking on Jesus, who stood before his judgment seat, as a mere man, wrongly judged, that he had spoken blasphemy, because he had made himself the Son of God ; Nay, he accounted him not only a mere man, but a profane and impious man, a false prophet, and a seducer of the people ; so that from this false prepossession, our Saviour’s confession must have appeared to him a blasphemy of the worst kind.

But this was not the first accusation of this kind charged on the holy and innocent Lamb of God. A similar charge is recorded in St. John’s gospel, (John v. 17. x. 32.) to which our blessed Lord had returned a satisfactory answer. (John 34, 35, 36, 37, 38.) This is still the way of the world, ever charging the faithful servants of God with repetitions of trite calumnies and accusations, which have often been refuted before. Hence we may learn,

1. That it is not unusual for the persecutors of true believers, to be guilty of the same sins and enormous crimes, with which they accuse the servants of God. Thus the High Priest himself, in declaring the only begotten Son of God to be a blasphemer, commits the greatest blasphemy. Satan had so far blinded the High Priest, the head of the Jewish nation, as to condemn for blasphemy two of the most sacred truths, the sources of all comfort in life and

death; namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he sitteth at the right hand of Power. The heads of the Jewish church had long before blasphemed the doctrines of our blessed Saviour, declaring them false and heretical. They had blasphemed his divine miracles, by imputing them to the secret operation of the prince of the devils. They had blasphemed his sacred person, calling him a Samaritan, a glutton, and wine-bibber, and accusing him of having a devil, or a familiar. And now, their blasphemy soars to the very highest pitch; for they attack his very office of Messiah, and deny his being the eternal Son of God; charging him with blasphemy, because he openly professed himself the Messiah, as, in reality, he was. Nay, on two different occasions, viz. at the river Jordan, and on Mount Tabor, the Father by a voice from heaven had proclaimed, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The devil himself had frequently, by the mouth of the Demoniacs, declared Jesus to be the Son of the Most High, and the Holy One of God. (Mark i. 24. v. 7.)

2. From this unjust accusation of the Son of God we may learn, that by his suffering himself to be sentenced to death in our stead, as a blasphemer, he gave the highest proof of his love for us. For by this he has expiated the crime committed by our first parents, and the guilt, of which all his descendants are partakers. Their fall was an indirect blasphemy against the majesty of God. For man sought, by the instigation of the devil, to rob God of his honour, and to arrogate it to himself. He would fain be like God, and obtain a knowledge of good and evil, equal to that of omniscience itself. He would acknowledge no superior to prescribe laws to him, and control his freedom; but his haughty soul would be an independent spirit, like God himself. Upon this, the father and representative of mankind, and we all with him and in him, fell under the sentence of temporal

and eternal death; which would have been consequently executed on us all. Now, for the atonement of this blasphemous sin, and to discharge us from that sentence of death consequential to it, the Son of God suffered himself to be sentenced to death, as one who would rob God of his honour, by making himself equal to God. Let us hence learn, that the fall of Adam was not such a trifling fault; and did not consist merely in tasting an apple, as some profane men would insinuate with a sneer, who even dare to censure the all-wise God for his severity to Adam, because he tasted a forbidden fruit. Alas! the tasting of the apple was but an overt-act of the treason which had already caused the fall within him; and which consisted in an execrable departure from God, a presumptuous desire of being equal in knowledge, &c. with his Creator, and consequently of debasing God, in order to exalt himself. For this blasphemous presumption, there could be no other satisfaction, than that the only Son of God should suffer himself to be brought to a trial, and sentenced to die as a blasphemer. In this is verified the Messiah's complaint to his Heavenly Father, in the Psalms, which is also repeated by St. Paul, 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me.' (Psalm lxxix. 9.) Blasphemy is the highest pitch of wickedness which human nature can be guilty of; and yet it lurks too often in the human heart, which should make us shudder at the thought. Our Lord himself observes, 'That out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witnesses, and blasphemies.' (Matt. xv. 19.) This bitter root shoots forth when any external opportunity offers, and shews itself in the wicked and unconverted in blasphemies against God and his sacred word, and in profane obloquy against the Divine Majesty; especially when they are under any violent pain. For St. John (Rev. xvi. 9, 10, 11.) observes, that 'wicked men, being scorched with

great heat, blasphemed the name of God, who had power over those plagues, and they repented not to give him glory : they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains, and of their sores.' Hence some are of opinion, that it will be the only sin of the damned to lift their tortured tongues to all eternity against God, and rage against, and blaspheme the Author of their being ; for they will then be under an incapacity of committing murders, thefts, and other sins. From this eternal torment, the Son of God, in suffering himself to be sentenced as a blasphemer, hath delivered all those who truly repent of their impious speeches against heaven, and believe on his name. But even pious souls are sometimes surprised with blasphemous and evil thoughts, at which they themselves shudder, and often fall into great trouble and anguish of mind on that account. For satan, even whilst they are praying, reading, meditating on the word of God, or attending the public worship, discharges such fiery darts into their minds, which gives them more pain than any outward temptations. Now for the remission of both kinds of blasphemy, namely, that committed by the profane and unconverted, and those evil thoughts which intrude themselves on the children of God, to whom they give the most painful concern, Christ suffered himself to be accused of blasphemy in the council of the wicked. There are still hopes of grace even for obstinate and prophane blasphemers, if they will but heartily repent of their horrid guilt, and fly for refuge to Jesus Christ their Mediator and Intercessor. Let none therefore despair, who are heartily sorry for this heinous sin ; for to despair on account of it is still worse than blasphemy itself. But with much more assurance, may they, who, against their will, are only passive in regard to such blasphemous thoughts, lay claim to the merits of Christ ; believe, that in consequence of his spotless innocence, who was accused as a blasphemer,

their Heavenly Father will not impute to them those evil thoughts, which they themselves detest and abhor; will but charge them to the account of that evil spirit, who suggested them to the unwilling mind.

Moreover a false gloss was set upon this horrid accusation, in order to render it more probable, and worthy of credit. This consisted in the following circumstances:

1. The High Priest rent his clothes. Now the High Priest was expressly forbidden to rend his clothes, which was a custom practised among the Jews, to express their extreme trouble at hearing any blasphemy against God. (Lev. xxi. 10. Thus Hezekiah and his servants rent their clothes at the blasphemy of Rabshakeh. (2 Kings xviii. 37. xix. 1.) Thus the High Priest would shew by this action, that he was so moved and transported with zeal at the blasphemy uttered by Jesus of Nazareth, that he could not contain his rage; but tore his garments, contrary to the Divine injunction. Thus were the sufferings of our blessed Lord aggravated by this hypocritical act of the High Priest.

But the High Priest's rending his clothes, in his excess of zeal, seems to be an emblem of the approaching abolition of the Levitical public worship. As the rent in Samuel's clothes signified that the Lord had given the kingdom of Israel from Saul to his neighbour, who was more worthy of it; (1 Sam. xv. 27, 28.) so did this rent also denote, that the High Priesthood should be rent from the tribe of Levi, and given to a better High Priest. Hence an ingenious writer says 'One may see that the High Priest, when he condemned Christ to die, rent his clothes, and thereby entirely put an end to the dignity and power of his priesthood; whereas Christ's garments were not torn or divided, thereby to indicate the eternity of his priesthood.'

2. The High Priest rejected all other witnesses as unnecessary and superfluous, and said, 'What far-

ther need have we of witnesses?' What signifies hearing any more evidences, when his crimes are as clear as the sun at noon day? The judges, by all their false witnesses, had not been able to compass their end; so that now they were over-joyed when they had, by our Saviour's own confession, found a shorter way of convicting him.

3. The High Priest appealed to the whole assembly, 'Behold! now ye have heard this blasphemy.' You yourselves, my worthy colleagues, are the most unexceptionable witnesses. Hitherto we had only heard it from the mouths of others; but this very instant we have heard his blasphemy from his own mouth, and our ears still tingle with the horrid sound.

4. The High Priest desired their opinion on the affair, saying, 'What think ye?' He had already by his own judgment artfully anticipated theirs, had declared Christ's confession to be blasphemy, and, in his hypocritical zeal, even rent his clothes. After having thus, as it were, dictated to his colleagues and assistants how to vote, he asks their opinion of the matter; whereas, had he proceeded equitably, he should first have maturely examined, whether the confession of Jesus contained any thing contrary to the writings of Moses and the prophets, or that could justly be construed as blasphemy. But instead of making any farther enquiry, sentence of death was precipitately pronounced without any real proof of the crime.

III. We come now, in the last place, briefly to consider the sentence of condemnation: 'They all condemned him, and answered and said, 'He is guilty of death.' Here it may be objected, Was not Nicodemus, was not Joseph of Arimathea among the number? How then comes St. Mark to affirm, that they ALL condemned him. To this it may be answered, that either these good men were not present, or were looked upon only as cyphers by the rest. This conjecture is confirmed by St. Luke; (chap. xxiii. 21.) for to the eternal honour of Joseph of Ari-

mathea, it is said, 'the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.' And though, by his opposition, he could not avert the sentence of death that was passed on our blessed Saviour ; yet is his protest entered in the Book of God, and, on the day of the appearance of the Lord Jesus, will be publicly made known to his unspeakable comfort and applause. Moreover, there is no doubt, but that among the other members of the council there were not wanting some who were convinced of our Lord's innocence ; and if they joined in condemning him, their compliance did not proceed from ignorance, hatred, or envy ; but from the fear of man, that they might not incur the High Priest's displeasure, or be thus reproached, as Nicodemus was, 'Art thou also a Galilean?' (John vii. 52.) Besides, 'many of the chief Rulers believed on him ; but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him,' and concealed their sentiments ; 'for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' (John xii. 42, 4 .)

They cried out with one voice, He is guilty of death. They did not only say, He shall die ; but that he well deserved to die ; and that by their sentence, and by the Jewish law, it was fit he should suffer death. For this they thought they had sufficient authority from the Divine law, which says, 'He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death ; and all the congregation shall certainly stone him : as well as the stranger, and he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.' (Lev. xxiv. 16.) He that blasphemed the name of God, it is true, deserved to die ; but nothing could be more unjust than the application of the crime to the innocent Jesus. For, as our blessed Lord had sufficiently shewn by his divine works, that he was the Messiah and great Prophet who had been foretold by Moses, they should have considered that Moses had predicted, that the words of God, i. e. words which none but God

could utter with propriety, should be put in his mouth ; (compare Deut. xviii. 18. with John iii. 34.) that their own prophets had prophesied of the Son of Man, who should come in the clouds of heaven, and sit on the right hand of God. (Dan. vii. 13, 14. Psalm viii. 4, 5, 6. ex. 1.) Consequently, when he, whom they looked upon as merely the Son of Man, declared himself the Son of God, what he spoke could not be any blasphemy against his Heavenly Father. On the contrary, no farther examination was thought of. The blessed Jesus was denied the common indulgence given by the Jewish laws to every criminal, viz. that of making his defence ; and this Supreme Legislator was with the utmost impatient precipitancy condemned as a transgressor of the law, without a hearing. Hence we may learn the following truths :

1. It is no disgrace to a good cause to be rejected and condemned by the majority of an august assembly. This may appear strange to the ignorant and unthinking. But discerning persons, who know the nature of such assemblies, how many pliable members have a seat there, and how much the will of one, or a few leading men, predominates in them, will not at all be surprised at their partial proceedings. It cannot well be otherwise, than that human affairs should be determined in assemblies by a majority of voices : But the prince of darkness is seldom at a loss to gain over the most votes for the advantage of his kingdom, and the oppression of innocence and truth. The only begotten Son of God is here condemned by a majority of votes ; and the world will not deal more favourably with his disciples and followers.

2. Christ, indeed, was unjustly condemned in a human court of judicature ; but even according to the sentence of the divine justice, he was also counted worthy of death. For he was become a surety for the whole race of sinners, who had deserved death. He took upon himself the crime of high treason against God, committed by our first parents ; per-

mitted the guilt of it to be imputed to him at the judgment-seat; and freely offered to submit to the sentence of death, which, according to the decree of divine justice, was to be executed on blasphemers. Therefore it is here said, 'He is guilty of death.' The eternal Son of God, having with the consent, and according to the will, of his Heavenly Father, allowed the guilt of our sins to be imputed to himself, and consequently our punishment to be inflicted on him, was truly worthy of death; and heard sentence pronounced on himself, without any compassion or favour, from the mouths of those judges who, in scripture, are termed Gods. Have we ever, during the course of our lives, cordially thanked our blessed Saviour on our knees for such an unparalleled instance of his love to the human race?

Tremble, all ye that still serve sin, and are under its influence and dominion! tremble at the rigour of divine justice against sin, which did not pardon the Son of God; for as he allowed our sins to be imputed to himself, so the sentence of death was passed on him. Will you still sport and play with sin? Will you still make it your delight, after it has drawn the sentence of death on the beloved Son of God? Alas! how just and reasonable will your condemnation be at the tremendous day of judgment, if neither the consideration of the rigour of divine justice has been able to prevail on you to forsake your sinful and wicked ways; nor the love of Him, who permitted himself to be sentenced to death for you, can induce and allure you to employ the rest of your lives in his service.

But as for you, who feel in your consciences the curse and sentence of death, passed on you by the law; comfort your terrified minds with these considerations. Lift up your eyes to the Lamb of God, the sacred victim on whom his Heavenly Father has imposed this curse and sentence of death. Your mediator and surety is, according to the law, sentenced

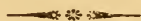
as guilty of death, and at the same time declared an accursed malefactor, and unworthy to live any longer among God's people. 'The chastisement of your peace was upon him : ' The sentence having been executed on him ; you are for ever discharged from it. Believe on this Jesus who was sentenced to death ; and ye ' shall not come unto judgment, but shall pass from death unto life.' He is taken from prison and from judgment : He, as the Son of God, is by the resurrection acquitted and discharged from the sentence of death. As you are already sentenced in his sacred person ; so are ye also acquitted and absolved with him after his resurrection. He could justly say, ' Behold the Lord God will help me, who is he that shall condemn me ? So likewise may you with all boldness say, Who will condemn me ? Christ who died, or rather who is risen again, (Rom. viii. 34.) is condemned in my stead ; and therefore there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. viii. 1.)

On the other hand, you, who are already in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, express your praise, love, and gratitude to your faithful Saviour, who, out of his great love to your immortal souls, has taken on himself the rigorous and painful sentence which you had justly deserved ! Count not your lives dear for His sake, who counted not his own life too dear to deliver it up for your salvation. Inure yourselves to the imitation of your Lord and master ; and arm yourselves with his sentence against all the accusations of sin and the law. Let the love of Christ compel you zealously to execute that sentence of death, which was already past on the old man in baptism. Account it base and unworthy that this enemy of God, who for its rebellion against the Divine Majesty is worthy of death, should live any longer in you ; that you may manifest in yourselves the distinguishing marks of those, to whom there is no longer any con-

demnation, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. (Rom. viii. 1.)

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and gracious Saviour! thanksgiving and praise, and honour and glory, be ascribed to thee, O Lamb of God, who wast slain for our sake, and didst take upon thee the sentence under which the whole race of mankind lay, and which was to be executed on us all; who didst suffer thyself to be cut off out of the land of the living, that we might be delivered from the sentence of everlasting death, and be declared heirs of eternal life. Let thy Holy Spirit illuminate our souls with the light of this incomprehensible love; and, whenever we are tempted to commit sin, cast an eye of pity on us, that we may derive new strength to renounce and overcome the world, and willingly even to pour out our lives unto death for thy sake. Amen.



CONSIDERATION X.

THE ILLEGAL AND RUDE TREATMENT OF CHRIST
AFTER SENTENCE WAS PASSED UPON HIM.

‘ THEN some began to spit on him, and they did spit in his face. And the servants, and the men who held Jesus, mocked him, smote him, and buffeted him. And they blindfolded him, and struck him on the face; and asked him, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.’ (Matt. xxvi. 67, 68. Mark xiv. 65. Luke xxii. 63, 64, 65.)

These words exhibit to us the illegal and contumelious treatment of the blessed Jesus, after sentence had been passed on him. For the members of the Sanhedrim, after having pronounced our blessed Saviour guilty of death as a supposed blasphemer,

were prevented by their fear of the people from proceeding to execute their sentence ; but resolved to recommend the execution of it to Pilate, the Roman governor. But as it was not yet light, all other proceedings against the Lord Jesus were suspended till the next morning ; and therefore the members of the council separated, and most of them went to their respective homes : others continued together in the High Priest's house, and others retired to rest in some of the apartments, or walked about, and passed away the time in conversation. But so much favour was shewn to the condemned Jesus, as to carry him to a quiet prison, and there to be kept until break of day, that he might enjoy a little rest after his fatigue and painful agony. On the contrary, he is turned over to the servants and officers of the court, who, during the rest of the night, insulted our blessed Lord, as their inveterate malice prompted them, in the most inhuman and barbarous manner. Thus on the last night of our blessed Saviour's life, his eyelids were never closed in sleep. And as the High Priests of the Old Testament did not use to sleep, on the night preceding the great Day of Atonement ; so the true High Priest of the New Testament was a stranger to sleep, by the cruelty of his enemies, the night preceding the important day on which the sins of the whole human race were to be expiated, that there might be the more exact conformity between the type and the great antitype. By this circumstance, our blessed Saviour has likewise sanctified the sleepless nights of his faithful servants, when either in the pangs of repentance, inward temptations, or outward sufferings and afflictions, they cannot forbear crying out with the Psalmist, 'Thou holdest mine eyes waking.' (Psalm lxxvii. 4.) So that when on any of these accounts we cannot sleep in our beds, let us think on these sleepless hours of our Lord and Saviour, on the night when he was betrayed, bound, and sentenced to death, and treated in the most contemptuous and barbarous manner.

In farther treating on these words, I shall consider,
First, The persons by whom our Saviour was thus injuriously treated, and

Secondly, The ill treatment which he patiently endured.

I. As to the persons by whom our blessed Saviour was injuriously treated, St. Matthew says only in general, 'They did spit in his face.' St. Mark is more particular, and observes that 'some began to spit on him, to cover his face, and to buffet him; and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.' But St. Luke expresses it thus: 'And the men that held Jesus mocked him.' It is very probable, that either the chief Priests themselves, or some other members of the Sanhedrim, when the assembly was dissolved, went out of the hall; and begun this unjust treatment, and, as it were, gave the signal for it, by spitting in his face as they passed by Jesus, and venting imprecations against him, as a detestable blasphemer. For, according to the connection of St. Matthew's account, they who had before said, 'he is guilty of death,' lead the way in this abusive treatment of our Saviour. Now this was not said by the servants, but by the members of the council; and St. Mark says, 'And some began to spit on him, and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands;' so that he distinguishes between those who began to spit on our blessed Lord, and the servants who struck him. When the council had set the example of insulting Jesus, and of giving him up, as an accursed person, to all manner of ill usage, all the servants and inferior officers soon followed it. These St. Luke calls 'the men who held Jesus;' namely, those who had apprehended and bound him, and still held him bound, being appointed to watch and secure him till the morning.—As this unruly multitude was composed of Roman soldiers, whom Pilate had furnished them with, and Jewish servants and officers, who belonged to the

Sanhedrim ; both were concerned in this abusive and injurious treatment, and passed away their time in offering the greatest insults and indignities to the Son of God. Before we proceed any further, we shall make the following observation on the subject before us.

'That they who do not know the Lord of Glory should revile him, is not to be wondered at ; but is it not astonishing, that he should daily be reviled by those who acknowledge him to be the son of God ? St. Paul says of the rulers of the Jews, 'that they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, had they known him.' (1 Cor. ii. 8.) With much more reason may it be said of these rude ignorant servants, they would not have spit on the blessed Jesus, and struck him, had they been sensible of the adorable dignity of his sacred person ; but they concluded that Jesus was a false prophet and a blasphemer, since the Sanhedrim had condemned him as such. And though at other times they would have pitied the greatest malefactor, when under sentence of death, rather than add to his sorrow, by ridiculing and insulting him ; yet the servants of the Jewish council imagined, that they did God service by thus injuriously treating a man, whom they looked upon as an impious blasphemer. But it is greatly to be apprehended, that in the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for these soldiers and servants, than for those wretched nominal Christians, who by their behaviour insult Him, whom they confess with their mouths.

II. As to the injurious treatment which our Lord suffered from these persons, it consisted in the seven following particulars. But previously to the particular consideration of each of these insults, we shall make some general remarks on the subject.

First, In this abusive treatment of the Son of God, the soldiers did not act merely according to the impulse of their depraved nature ; but their hands and

tongues were the instruments of the prince of darkness, who now poured on the Son of God all the indignities which infernal malice could invent.

Secondly, The prophetic office of Jesus Christ was the mark, at which the keen arrows of reproach were here chiefly levelled. The office in which the Son of God chiefly displays his wisdom, as his regal office declares his power, and his priestly office his love, here becomes the sport of fools; and it is vilified in the High Priest's palace, as the kingly office of Christ was chiefly insulted and derided in the palace of the Roman governor.

Thirdly, Though the Son of God may seem to be entirely delivered up to the rude insults of servants; yet nothing here happened to him but according to the predetermined council of God. Indeed, the devil acted in these sons of wickedness according to the impulse of his malignant nature; but God had set limits to his rage and malice, and without the least participation in his guilt, over-ruled every circumstance for the accomplishment of the prophecies, inspired by the Holy Ghost. According to these prophecies, as the Messiah, at his examination and trial was surrounded as it were by bulls and dogs, opening wide their mouths, as a ravening and roaring lion; (Psalm xxii. 12, 13, 16.) so was he now to experience what is foretold in the following passages of Scripture: 'The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: I am become a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.' (Psalm xxii. 6.) Here the Messiah was despised 'by man, abhorred by the nation, a servant of rulers.' (Isaiah xlix. 7.) He was 'despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from him, [by blindfolding him;] he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' (Isaiah liii. 3.) Here the Rock of salvation was lightly esteemed by his people. (Deut. xxxii. 15.) Here the Messiah's prophetic complaint

was fulfilled, 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting: I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. (Isaiah l. 6, 7.)

Lastly, Here was also fulfilled what the Lord Jesus himself had foretold, namely, 'The Son of Man shall be mocked, and spitefully treated, and spitted on.' (Luke xviii. 32.) Hence it appears that nothing fell out on this occasion, but what God in his wise counsel had predetermined concerning the Messiah, and likewise foretold by the mouth of his holy prophets. This is a powerful preservative against the offence of the cross.

Let us proceed to take a separate view of the several kinds of insults offered our blessed Saviour, and point out what useful meditations they afford to a pious soul. It is said by St. Luke,

1. 'And the men who held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.' (Luke xxii. 63.) We find in the history of our Saviour's passion, that during his sufferings, he was mocked in four several places; namely, in Caiaphas's house, in Herod's palace, (Luke xxiii. 11.) at Pilate's judgment seat, (Matt. xxvii. 27, 29, 31.) and on the Mount of Golgotha. (Matt. xxvii. 41. Luke xxiii. 36.) In all these passages, the other Evangelists use the same words as St. Luke does in the passage above cited. They not only mocked him, but it is added, 'they smote him,' i. e. they mocked him, striking him, and tearing off his skin. It is probable, that among other insults they took the blessed Jesus by the beard, and pulled it with such violence as to tear off the skin with the hair; and thus was literally fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, 'I gave my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.' That this was one of the most painful and ignominious insults used among the ancients, appears from many passages in profane authors.

2. 'They did spit in his face.' This both by Jews and Gentiles has ever been accounted a mark of the utmost contempt. It sensibly grieved the patient Job, 'that the children of base men did not spare to spit in his face;' (Job xxx. 8, 10.) and in the Old Testament, when any one refused to raise up a family for his brother who died without issue, by marrying his widow, she was in the presence of the elders to pull off his shoe, and spit in his face. Here a mean rabble impiously presume to spit on him, who is infinitely superior to Job. What an affecting sight must this have been, to see that amiable, benign countenance, which even angels delighted to behold, all covered over with loathsome spittle?

How is a true believer humbled at the consideration of this inconceivable abasement of the Son of God? And when he reflects, that this sacred face, the express image of the invisible God was here insulted with mocking and spitting, he cries out, "Oh, the incomprehensible prodigy, both of divine love and human wickedness! How is it, O Lord, that thy sacred face was covered with spittle and bruises? that face, resplendent with divine glory; that face, which on Mount Tabor shone like the meridian sun; that face, before which adoring angels veil their faces, as dazzled with its insupportable effulgence. It is I that deserve to be spit on; it is I that deserve to be driven from God's presence; for I have not forbore to sin before his face, who is present every where. I thank thee, my Lord and Saviour, for such an astonishing abasement. But thou thyself hast been pleased to reveal to me the sacred motives and generous views, that induced thee to submit to it, by saying, 'For thy sake, O God, I have borne reproaches; shame hath covered my face: The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.' (Psalm lxix 7, 9.) Hence I learn, that the honour of thy Almighty Father to which thou wast to make satisfaction, together with the greatness and heinousness

of my sins, which thou as our surety didst take on thee, required that thou shouldst be outraged as the disgrace of mankind. Praise and honour be to thee, O Lamb of God, for these proofs of thine obedience to thy Heavenly Father, and thy tender love to my soul."

3. 'They smote him with the palms of their hands, or with rods.'

4. 'They buffeted,' or smote him with their fists. St. Luke, indeed, expresses these insults in one single phrase; but St. Matthew and St. Mark make use of two different words, denoting, that some struck our blessed Saviour on the cheeks with the palms of their hands, and likewise on that sacred mouth, which had always most religiously observed the law of truth. Thus they insulted him as a liar and false prophet; as Zedekiah struck the prophet Micah on the cheek; and Pashur offered the same indignity to Jeremiah. (1 Kings xxii. 24. Jer. xx. 2.)

5. 'They blindfolded him,' i. e. they either covered his face, or held their hands before his eyes. It was a custom among the Orientals, to cover the heads of persons under sentence of death, of which there is an instance in the story of Haman; (Esther vii. 8.) and this custom was not unknown among the Romans. Possibly the majesty of our blessed Lord's eyes was more than these servants could bear; and therefore they covered them, that his piercing looks might not disturb these wretches in their insolent wantonness. Besides, their execrable view in this insult was, to make a pastime of the sufferings of our Saviour, by blindfolding and striking him, and then asking who gave him the blow. Therefore it is immediately added,

6. 'They struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee?' Thus they make a mock of the eternal wisdom, and ridicule our Lord's prophetic office for which the Father had sanctified him, and sent

him into the world. Jesus had before acknowledged himself to be the Messiah; and at the same time, when he made that acknowledgment, disclosed an effulgent ray of his omniscience, saying, 'Henceforth shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' (Matt. xxvi. 64.) Moreover, our blessed Lord was acknowledged throughout all Israel as a prophet; and, but a few days before, at his entrance into Jerusalem, the people with loud acclamations had publicly proclaimed, 'This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee.' (Matt. xxi. 11.) Now, as prophets not only foretold things to come, but likewise used to discover secret things, as appears from the example of Elisha; (2 Kings vi. 26.) so they require the Lord Jesus to give them a proof of his prophetic knowledge, by telling them, who were the particular persons that struck him while he was blindfolded. This indeed was the most malignant abuse of our Saviour's prophetic office.

But this indignity offered the Lord of glory may put a true believer in mind of his sinful depravity. For what is more customary, than for the omniscient Creator to be treated by sinful men as if he were blind, and ignorant of their evil doings? They vainly imagine that they can conceal their sins so dexterously, and conduct them with such secrecy, that God will never know who strikes at his honour, by offering him such an insult. Thus Judas, but a very little before, was an instance of the blindness of the human heart; who, when our blessed Lord spoke of his betrayer, had the effrontery to ask him, 'Lord, is it I?' (Matt. xv. 25.) On this presumption the Spirit of God pronounces a woe: 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord; and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?' (Isaiah xxix. 5.)

Here the true believer may say, 'Thanks be to thee, my Saviour and Redeemer, for suffering thy sacred

face to be so reproachfully covered, that my face might not be eternally covered with shame; and that I may not be carried away to endless torments, but that with open face I may behold the glory of the Lord. O preserve me from all those sins which brought on thee these indignities, and grant that I may one day, with the glorified saints, behold thy glorious face in righteousness! (Psalm xvii. 15.)

7. Lastly, it is said, 'And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.' St. Luke seems to have been so affected with the subject, that he could not particularly enumerate all the sarcasms, invectives, and reproaches with which, in this hour of darkness, our blessed Saviour's ears were assaulted. He therefore breaks off abruptly, and says, 'Many other things blasphemously spake they against him;' which the Evangelist, probably, thought not worthy to be had in remembrance. Here were tongues set on fire of hell, and possessed by the spirit of calumny, which from them, as from bent bows, discharged numberless arrows of defamatory words against Jesus the Son of God.

Here a pious soul may justly wonder on two accounts, which are not to be fathomed by its comprehension. The first is the long-suffering of the Heavenly Father, who for some hours successively saw, without displaying his power, his only beloved Son, the delight of his heart, and the express image of his person, thus mocked, outraged, and beaten. The second cause of wonder is the Son's patience, who, though he could by one word strike these miscreants dead, yet stands like a silent lamb; magnanimously despises reproach and contempt; and, amidst all the uproar of scoffers and revilers, remains composed and undisturbed. He neither reviled nor struck again; and amidst all the wrongs that were done him, both by words and actions, never shewed the least inclination to revenge. On the contrary, he serenely lifted up his eyes to his Heavenly Father, and recommend-

ed every thing to him, who judgeth righteously. Alas ! may a true believer say, How unlike are modern Christians to the pattern set them by their Lord and master ? How does a poor worm kindle into rage only at a disagreeable look ? Nay, it is made a point of honour to put up no affront ; and meekness, though sanctified by the illustrious example of the Son of God, is accounted mean and scandalous ; so many of the received maxims of honour are directly contrary to our Saviour's commands. I am very sensible, O my Saviour, that I have still such a haughty and impatient heart, and that I am very far from imitating the pattern of thy gentleness. I strongly feel in myself the emotions of anger, at the least mockery, insult, or abuse, offered me. But I beseech thee, O Lamb of God, that, by thy patience and longanimity, thou wilt quell the turbulent and rebellious motions of my heart : and grant me grace that, as in all other virtues, so likewise in gentleness and meekness, I may be conformed more and more unto thine image.

THE PRAYER.

O ETERNAL wisdom, blessed be thy glorious name for giving up thyself to the hands of sinners, that we might be freed from the cords of satan, in which he would eternally have led us, and which are now happily broken asunder. Thanks be to thee O Lord Jesus, for all the mockeries, insults, and indignities, which thou didst endure. Spread over our sins of pride and impatience the sacred merit of thy meekness ; under these thy sufferings. Forgive us all the sins of our lives, which we have committed by petulency, insulting laughter, abuse, ridicule, contempt, and reproach ; or by a carnal impatience and revenge of affronts. Plant in our hearts a desire of following thy example of mildness and long-suffering, that we may rather choose to be reproached by the world for thy sake, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a sea-

son. Refine our nature with thy gentleness and longanimity, for the sake of thy eternal love. Amen.



CONSIDERATION XI.

THE SECOND EXAMINATION AND CONDEMNATION OF CHRIST BEFORE THE JEWISH SANHEDRIM.

‘AND straightway in the morning, as soon as it was day, the chief Priests, the Elders of the people, and the Scribes, came together, and led him into their council. And they said, Art thou the Christ? Tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the Power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.’ (Matth. xxvii. 1. Mark xv. 1. Luke xxii. 66—71.)

In these words we have an account,

First, Of the second examination,

Secondly, The second sentence and condemnation of Christ, before the Jewish Sanhedrim.

I. In the second examination, four particulars offer themselves to our consideration.

1. Here is mentioned the time when this was transacted. This was ‘early in the morning, as soon as it was day.’ During the night, which now was drawing to a period, the Sanhedrim had spent several hours successively in examining and sentencing our blessed Saviour; and afterwards, as nothing farther could be done till the next morning, the assembly had broke up, and delivered Jesus into the hands of the soldiers and servants. These, during the remainder of the night, committed against

his sacred person the most brutal indignities, as we have shewn above in the preceding Consideration. But no sooner did the day begin to dawn, than the whole council met again ; either, as some think, in a large apartment, in the temple, called Gazith, where they commonly used to meet ; or, as others with greater probability imagine, they again assembled in Caiaphas's house, the place where they had met the night before : For St. John (chap. xviii. 28.) does not say that they led Jesus out of the temple to the judgment-seat, but from Caiaphas, and out of his house. Though they had sat very late, and had not retired to rest but two hours before break of day ; yet were they again assembled before sun-rise, that no time might be neglected for the dispatch of their wicked purposes.

Oh ! that the children of light were as careful to redeem the time, as these children of darkness, 'who sleep not except they have done mischief ; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall ;' (Proverbs iv. 16.) who, being impelled by the evil Spirit, are so indefatigable in the execution of their sinful projects, that they value neither sleep nor rest, if they can but attain their wicked ends. These members of the Sanhedrim were wretched slaves to the devil ; who allowed them no rest that night, but kept their eyes open, that they might not sleep while they were employed in the works of darkness. At the same time, these ought to put many thousands of indolent Christians to the blush, who had rather omit the service of God, than in the least abridge themselves of their natural rest. Oh that we may for the future better employ our morning hours ! Are the slaves of satan so early abroad for the execution of their wicked designs, which they think will not admit of any delay ? Shall not the children of light, who have such important affairs on their hands, and are fighting for a never-fading crown of glory, likewise avail themselves of the morning

hours, when the mind is calm and serene, and is best disposed for spiritual meditations, prayer, and other devout exercises? Satan is very industrious to gain the first possession of the mind in the early hours of the day, as well as in youth, the morning of our lives, and to fill it with thoughts vain and frivolous, if not manifestly sinful; or crouds it with a groupe of vicious thoughts, earthly cares, and worldly anxieties. For he well knows, that it is a great point gained, if he can but dissipate our thoughts before they are collected, and prepared for praying and praising God. Therefore, it behoves us to be wise and vigilant, and prevent his early incursions. Our blessed Saviour, by appearing so early before the judgment-seat of the Jews, has obtained for us the privilege of early approaching the Throne of Grace. Let us, therefore, henceforth use this precious privilege with more humility, gratitude, and assiduity, than we have hitherto done.

2. The examiners and their assistants are here specified: At this second examination, all the chief Priests, *i. e.* all those persons, who either were descended from any of the High Priest's families, or had themselves actually held that office; the Scribes, who studied the law of Moses, and explained the writings of the prophets; and lastly, the elders of the people who, though they were laymen, sat likewise in Moses's chair, and enforced the observance of the political law, which God had given by Moses. Thus, all the members of the Sanhedrim or great council were assembled on this occasion. Possibly, several members of this great assembly might not have been present the night before: But as the sentence of death, of which they had judged our Saviour guilty, was now to be ratified, and the execution of it to come under deliberation; they were all summoned. lest the absence of some of them should cast a reproach on the others who should be present; or lest it should be said, that Christ was not condem-

ned by the unanimous votes of all the members. However, though the assembly was more numerous than it had been the preceding night, yet it was still the assembly of the wicked ; and the sentence it confirmed, was a most unjust and infamous sentence : For what is in itself sinful and iniquitous is not rendered more just or legal by a great number of suffrages. A bad cause is still bad, though it be patronized by thousands, and has the sanction of the most respectable and numerous assemblies.

3. Here is mentioned the drift of these wicked men, and the end of their meeting. ‘They took counsel against Jesus to put him to death,’ (Matth. xxvii. 1.) It was their fixed resolution that he should die ; but the end of this second meeting was to confirm the sentence which had already been passed, and to consult on the readiest and safest means for putting it in execution. It aggravates their guilt, that in their second meeting, they had still the same flagitious and blood-thirsty designs as in the first : For though a good intention cannot make a bad cause good ; yet a wicked intention may render it still worse, and more unjustifiable. For instance, two persons may be guilty of telling a lie. One utters a falsehood out of fear, and, perhaps to save his life from imminent danger ; the other does it with a determinate purpose of bringing his neighbour in danger of his life : Doubtless, the lie which the latter is guilty of becomes more criminal than the lie of the former, because his design is more malignant and pernicious. Again, two persons may bring an ill report on their neighbour. One, perhaps, utters it from weakness of judgment, credulity, or simplicity, as he has heard the calumny from others ; whereas, the other spreads it abroad with a view to prejudice his neighbour’s reputation, and to render him odious to the world. Now, who will doubt but that the slander of the latter, in this instance, is much worse than that of the former, on account of his ill intention ? Thus the Jewish assem-

bly, by the execrable design of its members, became an abomination to God, and all men of virtue and probity ; since it is evident from hence, that the condemnation of the Messiah was not a sudden thing, but that it was done with mature deliberation and malice propense ; which highly aggravated their guilt in the sight of God.

4. Lastly, We proceed to the examination itself, which consisted of two questions, and two answers.

The High Priest's first question was this : ' Art thou the Christ ? Tell us.' They had already put this question to Jesus ; for it is said by St. John, (chap. x. 24.) ' Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, ' How long dost thou make us to doubt ? If thou be the Christ tell us plainly.' As if they had said, We can gather nothing from thy words ; since at one time thou callest thyself the Bread of Life, and another time the Light of the World, the Door of the sheepfold, the Shepherd, &c. therefore tell us plainly, without any allegory or similitude, whether thou art the Messiah, who was promised to our forefathers. This is what the members of this wicked assembly wanted to be informed of, in order to compass their designs. To this purpose, they had ordered our blessed Saviour from the lower apartments of the palace, where he had hitherto been under the care of the Officers and servants, to be brought before the council. Here they proposed this question to him, ' Art thou the Christ or Messiah ?' adding this express command to resolve it, ' Tell us.' As if they had said, Whatever scruples thou mayest have about declaring it so plainly to the people, it is thy duty to declare it to us ; for we sit in Moses's chair as your lawful judges, and it concerns us greatly to know, whether thou art that great prophet, promised long since by Moses. Thus they were for putting a good gloss upon this question, that Jesus might be under the less apprehension of frankly declaring the truth to them. Thus the persecutors of

the servants of God still are very expert at the art of inspiring confidence into them, by their interrogations, in order to get the whole truth out of them.

To this first question our Saviour gives a plain answer. This, indeed, was more than they could reasonably expect, as Jesus had, but a few hours before, fully answered the same question. The man who had been born blind, though but a person of mean condition, at length grew angry, when the great council so often questioned him about the same thing; for when they said again to him, 'What did he to thee? 'How opened he thine eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told ye already, and ye did not hear, or attend to what I said. Wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?' (John ix. 26, 27.) Thus he grew out of patience, when he was teized with so many questions about the same transaction. But the Son of God here shews an admirable example of patience; and readily returns an answer to the repeated questions of his enemies, that his silence might not give them a handle to say that his answers were equivocal, or that his silence shewed his contempt of the Rulers and Judges. However he so framed his answer, as to convey an additional sting to their consciences; for this answer contained, not only a mild reproof of his unrighteous judges, but likewise a repeated declaration of his approaching glory.

In the reproof which our blessed Lord gives to his unrighteous judges, he represents to them their unbelief, and invincible obstinacy.

I Their unbelief is reprov'd in these words: 'If I tell you, ye will not believe.' They had just before required the Lord Jesus to tell them, whether he was the Christ; to which he made this answer. As if he had said, "If ye will not acknowledge me to be the Messiah, from the works which I have done, especially the Divine miracles which I have

wrought, much less will ye believe me on my bare word, should I aver it to you a hundred times over. 'This your reiterated question, therefore, as it does not proceed from a candid enquiry after truth, instead of a fresh answer, rather deserves a reproof for your incredulity.'" But this reproof the Saviour of mankind uttered, with the most sensible concern for the unparalleled unbelief and obduracy of his judges. He had earnestly laboured, during the course of his ministry, to bring the Jews to a belief of this great truth, viz. that he was the Messiah. He had plainly declared to them the terrible consequences of their unbelief, in these words, 'If ye believe not that I am He [the Messiah], ye shall die in your sins,' (John viii. 24.) On the other hand, he had represented to them the glorious privileges, and inestimable benefits, of faith in the Messiah: 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life,' (John vi. 47.) But all these endeavours of the benevolent Jesus had made no impression on their obdurate hearts. He was now inwardly grieved, to see how these wicked and perverse men would die in their unbelief, and consequently would perish in their sins; and from this inward and tender concern for their souls proceeded his reproof.

2. Their invincible obstinacy is represented in these words: 'And if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.' The meaning of these words is, "Though I answer your question, you do not believe me; and if, by proposing other questions to you, I should endeavour to put you in the way of truth, yet such is your obstinacy that ye will give me no answer. You will not take into consideration this important article of the Jewish Theology." This behaviour of the Jews Christ had more than once experienced. Thus, it is said by St. Luke (chap. xiv. 2, 3.) 'And behold there was a certain man before him, who had the dropsy. And Jesus answering, spake unto the Lawyers and Pha-

risees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace.' It is likewise observed by St. Matthew (chap. xxi. 23—27.) that when our blessed Lord proposed a question about the baptism of John to the chief Priests and the Elders, they returned no other answer but 'We cannot tell.' As this had been their custom when Jesus freely conversed with them, it was much more probable that they would behave in the same rude manner, as he was now their prisoner. Had Jesus in these circumstances asked them some questions, in order to draw sufficient proofs from their answers that he was the Messiah; had he, for instance, asked them, why they permitted John the Baptist to be looked upon as the Messiah, though he performed no miracles? why they did not believe that same Baptist, when he declared him to be the Messiah, and pointed him out to the people, saying, 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world?' &c. they would either have kept a sullen and contemptuous silence, or haughtily answered, We are not come here to be examined by thee, but to examine our prisoner. And however their consciences might have been touched by his questions; however he might have convinced them of the truth; yet they would not have set him at liberty, nor let him go. For it was before absolutely determined to put him to death at all events, whether he should be found innocent, or guilty. He therefore represents to them their iniquitous designs, and evil dispositions: and by that means gives them to understand, that he saw into the inmost recesses of their hearts, and knew their most secret thoughts and intentions. This should have induced this haughty assembly to conclude, that they had before them a sacred Person who was more than man. This is the design of the first part of our Saviour's answer.

The second part of it contains a repeated declaration of his approaching glorification, and exaltation

to the right hand of God: 'Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit at the right hand of the power of God.' This I call a repeated declaration; for our blessed Saviour had, two hours before, used words of the same import, which have been already explained in Consideration IX. The meaning of the words is, as if our blessed Lord had addressed them, in these, or words of the like purport: "I am not ignorant, that my contemptible and abject appearance is the chief cause of your unbelief; for such an obscure condition by no means agrees with your prejudices about a powerful Messiah, surrounded by all the ensigns of majesty. But you ought to consider that the Messiah, in the writings of the Prophets which are every sabbath read in your ears, is represented to you in a two-fold state; the one a state of the lowest abasement and humiliation, and the other a state of the highest exaltation and glory. I have hitherto conversed with you in my low, abject state; but a few hours more brings this state of abasement to a period. For when ye shall have executed the sentence of death which you have passed on me, this despised Son of Man, who at present stands before you bound like a criminal, and will soon be stript naked, and hung on the cross like a thief or a murderer, shall rise again from the dead; shall ascend up to heaven in a visible and triumphant manner; and shall sit on the right hand of God, or be admitted into the participation of his unlimited power over heaven and earth. After that, an effectual answer to your question shall come from heaven, and ye shall see, feel and experience such proofs and manifestations of my Divine glory, as will force your assent to this truth; especially when, with such a swiftness and rapidity as if I rode on the clouds of heaven, the chariots of God, I shall come to destroy your polity, and accomplish on your devoted city and temple those judgments of God, which have long since been denounced against them." This is the purport of

the first answer, which our Lord made to the first question, viz. 'Art thou the Christ?'

On this follows the second question; namely, art thou the Son of God? they took occasion to propose this second question from our blessed Saviour's repeated declaration, mentioned above. They readily comprehended that Christ, by saying that he should sit at the right hand of Power, intimated that he was a person of transcendent dignity, equal with God. Therefore they were desirous to know, whether he still adhered to this declaration that he was the son of God, and that, in such a sense as to be deemed equal to the God of Israel in majesty and glory. This his twofold dignity, of being the Messiah, and the Son of God, was, according to the scriptures of the Old Testament, to center in one person. This may be gathered from the following, among other passages, where God speaks to the person who is there termed the Anointed or Messiah, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,' (Psalm ii. 7.) and from this the Jewish church might have learned, that the Messiah was also to be the Son of God. However this crafty and insidious judge was for examining the Lord Jesus on each point separately, in order to make a complicated crime of his answer. And though this question, 'Art thou the Son of God?' had been answered by our blessed Lord the night before; yet in the morning they questioned him a second time about it, in order to give their infamous hypocrisy a more specious appearance, as if they were unwilling to proceed hastily in so important a matter. They pretended, that possibly the prisoner had not rightly considered the matter, but in the first agitations of his mind might have inadvertently said what he is now sorry for; that probably he would now recall his blasphemy, and explain himself better. But in their malicious hearts they had firmly determined, whatever answers Jesus might return to their questions, to put him to death, and that with all possible expedition.

Hereupon follows our Saviour's second answer in these words : ' He said unto them, Ye say that I am.' Here Jesus gives them again a plain answer, and, as it were, repeats his declaration. As if he had said, "I am the Son of God in the same sense that your question proposes it. I am such a Son of God as is equal to his Father, and has in common with him the divine nature, and all its essential attributes." Now this was the confession which they wanted to hear ; this declaration of Christ they caught at like ravenous wolves ; for they pretended that now they might safely ratify the sentence of death. Hence we may deduce the following doctrines :

1. Obstinate infidelity is so far from being heroism, that it is the most culpable folly.

Our Saviour here expressly reproveth the chief Priests and Scribes for not believing him to be the Messiah, after he had given sufficient proof of it by his wonderful works, and divine miracles. Nay, our blessed Lord was highly offended at the unbelief of his own disciples ; for, on some appearance of it in two of his followers, after his resurrection, he thus reproveth them, ' O fools ! and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,' (Luke xxiv. 25.) Here Christ gives their incredulity no better an appellation, than folly. However, there is a class of men among whom infidelity passes for the standard of wisdom, and who highly value themselves on their singularity in not believing as others do. They would fain be looked upon as free-thinkers, who have a deeper insight into the nature of things ; who have got over vulgar prejudices and the doctrines of religion, which, though swallowed by the ignorant herd, will not go down with them. But these free-thinkers, and heroic spirits, these refined geniuses who affect to distinguish themselves from the vulgar by infidelity, and, without any just grounds, or reasonable enquiry after truth, reject the very fundamental principles of Christianity, as things only fit for credu-

lous minds ; these, I say, are represented by the unerring Spirit of God as mere fools : ‘ The fool hath said in his heart there is no God,’ (Psalm xiv. 1.) Satan, it is true, makes use of a weak credulity for plunging a person into ruin ; but an obstinate and insolent unbelief, which ridicules the clearest proofs, and will by no means be convinced, is certainly no virtue, or sign of an heroic spirit. Such an irrational fool, who boasts of his absolute infidelity, acts as absurdly, as if a deformed dwarf should entertain an high opinion of his person, because his shape is not according to the common proportions of nature ; or, as if a person who is born blind should value himself on the want of sight, and would have it looked upon as a singular proof of the strength of his intellects, that he believes nothing of light and colours. Monsters of impiety and absurdity ! who make God a liar, that they may pass for men of uncommon wisdom and penetration : for he that believeth not God hath made him a liar ; (1 John v. 10.) and what more intolerable affront can be offered to the Supreme Being, than to make a liar of the God of wisdom and truth ?

2. When the word of God reveals to us our condition, let us beware of hardening our hearts against its sacred influences by unbelief and self-love, lest this reproof of our blessed Saviour should be applicable to us, ‘ If I tell you, ye will not believe.’

Many when they read the word of God experience its illuminating power on their understanding, laying open the condition of their souls ; so that they plainly perceive, that they are not in that happy state of salvation which the word of God requires. But how superlatively unhappy is the man, who shuts his heart against these enlightening rays of the Divine word ! who obstinately hardens his heart through unbelief against the testimony of unerring wisdom ; and though he be convinced of his impenitence, and that he is void of faith towards God, and love to mankind,

yet will by no means believe it. On the contrary, he suffers himself to be so blinded and seduced by self-love as to fancy his condition much better than in reality it is. Let every one, therefore, as he values the salvation of his immortal soul, beware of this fond error, since it leads to hardness of heart and final impenitence; and seriously think on these words which the Holy Spirit applies to every sinner, 'To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,' (Heb. iii. 7, 8.)

3. It is a melancholy case, when the conscience is so hardened that divine truths will make no impression on it, and the sinner is silent to all the remonstrances of grace.

Here our blessed Saviour had to do with such obdurate judges, that nothing he could urge to awaken their consciences could convince, or extort an answer from them; so that to them might be rightly applied these words of the Psalmist, 'Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?' (Psalm lviii. 1.) Alas! how many are there to be met with that call themselves Christians, who are of this stamp. If one enters into discourse with, and pathetically represents to, them the dangerous state of their souls; if one endeavours by the strongest and most convincing arguments to bring them to a sense of their sins, and by the most earnest and pressing exhortations to touch their hearts; what a melancholy sight is it to see such persons unmoved and unaffected, without giving the least assurance that they will use their endeavours to reform their lives? These are certainly very mortifying proofs of the depravity of the human heart, and the power of sin; which gradually hardens it, and renders the sinner insensible to all instruction, and the awakening calls of God's word.

4. We must pass through many examinations and severe trials before we can be owned for the sons of God.

When Christ first entered on his ministerial office, no sooner had the voice from heaven proclaimed, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' but he was tempted on this account by satan; who presumptuously said to him, 'If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread; if thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down, &c. (Matt. iv. 3, 6.) And now, at the conclusion of his ministry, the engines of satan put this question to him twice successively within a few hours, 'Art thou the Son of God?' But as it was with our Head, the great Captain of our Salvation; so is it now with his members and faithful followers. While a man is walking on in his security before conversion, satan rejoices to find him reckoning himself among the adopted sons of God. Nay, he helps to strengthen him in his false opinion of his own sanctity; and represents to him, that to doubt whether he be the son of God is the most dangerous error he can be guilty of. Thus he works upon the minds of enthusiasts, who are generally puffed up with a high conceit of their own worthiness, and think themselves the peculiar favourites of God. But no sooner is God pleased to receive a truly penitent and regenerated person, through faith in Jesus Christ, to be in reality his adopted son, than satan begins to fill his mind with a thousand scruples about his acceptance with God; lays hold of his foibles and the slightest faults, from which no man can be free in this life; and endeavours to persuade him, that his hope and labour in the Lord are vain and fruitless. On the other hand, he, who never in his life had any doubt concerning his being the adopted son of God, has great reason to suspect his assurance and carnal security.

5. Christ, by his firm and resolute adherence to his declaration of the truth, has atoned for our wavering inconstancy, and irresolute behaviour in defending the truth.

This fault is frequently seen in courts of judicature, where those who are examined by the judges, concerning their real or supposed crimes, often have recourse to falsehood or equivocation ; and instead of adhering to the truth, relate things sometimes one way, and sometimes another, in order to puzzle the cause. This is likewise a fault in common conversation, and in private life. For as there are many who, according to the Scripture phrase, are 'double hearted;' so there are not a few who are likewise, as it were, double-tongued; who talk in a religious strain, when they are among the good and pious, and quite in a different language when among the dissolute and profane ; who would pass for virtuous men when it can be done without incurring danger ; but when any inconveniency is to be apprehended they disclaim the name of religious men, and rather join in ridiculing and reviling the godly. There are many who every day pray, in repeating the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses, and deliver us from the evil one;' but soon after will devote themselves to the devil, and utter the most horrid oaths and imprecations without any remorse, or sense of their wicked habit. Such monsters of men are to be found among those who call themselves Christians ! Nay, we daily see great numbers of such profane swearers who yet make a great figure in the world, and hold very considerable employments. Oh, that they would acknowledge this their scandalous duplicity of tongue, and turn to the immaculate Lamb of God in whose mouth was no deceit, guile, or prevarication ! That they would consider how absurd and monstrously wicked it must appear in the eye of God and all good men, that praying and cursing should proceed out of the same mouth !

II. The second sentence or condemnation of the Lord Jesus is thus described : 'And they said, What need we any farther witness ? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth,' (Luke xxii. 71.)

Before this, they had been very industrious in procuring witnesses ; yet after all their several depositions, they found it was to no purpose. But when the blessed Jesus afterwards acknowledged himself to be the Messiah and the Son of God, they dropped all the evidences of their witnesses, and endeavoured to convict him on his own confession ; which, in their blindness, they thought contained the most horrid blasphemy. When our blessed Saviour made this confession for the first time, the High Priest said, ‘ Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye ? ’ At this second confession they all unanimously say, ‘ We ourselves have heard of his own mouth.’ As if they had said, “ Since he abides by his former declaration, viz. that he is the Messiah, the Son of God ; so we abide by our sentence, that he is guilty of death. We supposed the prisoner would have thought better of the matter ; but now we see that he is an obstinate blasphemer, and that God has given him up to the judgment of obduracy. His blood be on his own head ! But we are in conscience obliged to cut off the evil one from Israel, that the righteousness of God, which has been so highly injured by his blasphemy, may receive some atonement by his blood.”

But how could these miscreants, ‘ who had ears, but did not hear,’ (Isaiah vi. 10.) say, we have heard his blasphemy ; for though they heard the sound of our Saviour’s words, yet their gross minds were utterly incapable of rightly comprehending their true meaning. Hence they called one of their most important articles of the Jewish religion blasphemy, and passed sentence of death on Him, whom God had appointed to be judge of the quick and the dead. However, we may on this occasion say, ‘ Even our enemies themselves are judges,’ (Deut. xxxii. 31.) and witnesses, that Jesus, our Mediator, has openly professed himself the Son of God ; which authentic tes-

timony we may use to our advantage against all the opposers of our blessed Saviour's divinity. We shall deduce the following inferences from what has been here said :

1. The time of repentance, which God graciously allows to sinners, before they have filled up the measure of their iniquities, if not rightly improved, is an aggravation of their guilt.

In the second condemnation of Christ, the members of the Sanhedrim acted a much more sinful part than in the former. If, in the first sentence they pronounced on our blessed Lord, they were carried away by the violence of their passions, God was graciously pleased to allow them some hours, coolly to reflect on what they had done. They ought then to have listened to the Psalmist's exhortation, 'Stand in awe and sin not : Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still,' (Psalm iv. 5.) They should have calmly considered the unjust sentence they had passed, and what remarkable words had been spoken by the blessed Jesus before the council. But since, notwithstanding this time of recollection allowed them, they proceeded to a second condemnation of the Son of God, and again confirmed the unjust sentence they had before pronounced on him, they incurred an additional guilt by their perseverance.

Let us seriously attend to this truth, viz. The greater the convictions are which precede a sin, and the more time for recollection God is graciously pleased to grant to a sinner before he leaves him to fill up the measure of his iniquity, the greater and more heinous are his transgressions after such indulgence. And though we may take no notice of such intervals allowed us for reflection, yet God keeps an exact account of them ; so that not only our actual sins, but also the aggravating circumstances attending them, will be all displayed to the whole world at the last tremendous day. Happy are they in the court of whose consciences this circumstance is already duly

examined during this life ; who are thoroughly sensible of their sins, and all the aggravations connected with them, and are filled with concern and remorse for the number and heinousness of their transgressions ! They may yet escape condemnation in the day of judgment, and find the remission of their sins in the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, their Saviour and Redeemer.

2. That the enemies of our blessed Lord derived the grounds of our Saviour's conviction and condemnation from our Saviour's own words, is a circumstance of great moment.

' They said, we ourselves have heard of his own mouth ;' so that they did not pronounce the sentence of death on hear-say evidence, but on what they themselves heard from Jesus himself.

By this, Christ has, in the first place, sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants ; since their judges frequently endeavour to extort some confession from their own mouths, that may afford a handle for a charge of heresy, and a false condemnation. Thus when that godly martyr John Huss was sentenced to be burnt alive, a certain Doctor falsely declared that, from his own mouth, he had heard him attribute four persons to the Godhead. The like circumstance has been observed in numberless instances in the trials of Christians, when for the sake of their Saviour's doctrine and honour, they were to be condemned to death. This species of suffering, therefore, the Son of God has sanctified to us by permitting himself to be sentenced for words which came out of his own mouth.

Our blessed Saviour has, in the second place, averted the heavy judgments which otherwise would have fallen on those who, by their innumerable, profane, and impious words, have deserved condemnation. When a sinner is awakened by his conscience ; when he considers that the sins of his tongue will be laid open in God's presence, and at the same time, recollects these words of Jesus Christ, ' By thy words

thou shalt be condemned, (Matt. xii. 27.) Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant,' (Luke xix. 22.) his mind must be certainly thrown into violent convulsions and inward agonies. But the eternal Son of God permitted himself to be judged and condemned from his own words, that the sentence of condemnation might be annulled, and strict judgment averted from all those who sincerely repent of the sins of their mouth, and believe on his name. He has permitted himself to be sentenced to die from his own words, as one who condemned himself, that we might not by our own words be condemned to everlasting death. But to this unspeakable consolation those only are entitled, who penitently acknowledge the numberless sins of their tongues; who are filled with remorse and anguish on the account of them, and dread the judgments of God; who make the immaculate Lamb of God, in whose mouth was no deceit, their refuge, give up their hearts to him, and persevere to the end in an uniform imitation of Jesus Christ.

3. Our blessed Saviour in suffering himself to be sentenced to death for his declaration, that he was the Son of God, obliges all of us to adhere to this important truth unto death.

To this great truth, namely, that Jesus is the Son of God, a noble army of martyrs have already subscribed with their blood. Therefore it behoves us to be thoroughly convinced of, and strenuously to defend, this important article of our faith. If ever there was a time when it was necessary to defend this truth, it is the present age, when the poison of Socinianism clandestinely spreads itself, and most easily infects those who set up for men of the greatest parts and genius. Let us then implore God, that he will give us a steadfast faith in his Son, and strengthen us against all the power of the gates of hell. It is an unspeakable comfort to us, that Christ, by his being thus condemned to die, has acquired both

strength and boldness for so many of his faithful servants to sign this his good confession with their blood; who now are received by him into the mansions of bliss, and, in the Divine presence, are filled with joy by the adorable Son of God, who sitteth at the right hand of his Father.

Thus by God's assistance we have gone through that part of the history of our Saviour's passion, which contains the sufferings he endured before the Sanhedrim or spiritual court of the Jews at Jerusalem. May God, by his blessing, impress on our hearts all that has been said on this interesting subject! May every truth that has been deduced and inculcated from it be sealed by his Holy Spirit to our salvation; so that they may be to none of us a savour of death unto death, or an aggravation of our guilt; but rather the savour of life unto life everlasting.

THE PRAYER.

O FAITHFUL and ever-living Saviour! We praise thee for all the sufferings and indignities thou didst undergo, for our sake, before the spiritual court of the Jews. We bless thee, O Lord, who didst suffer thyself to be brought before the judgment-seat of men, that we might appear with boldness before the awful tribunal of God. We praise thee for permitting sentence of death to be passed on thee, that the sentence of everlasting death might to us be changed to a sentence of life. We bless thee for twice making thy constant and invariable confession of the truth, when thou didst declare thyself to be the Christ the Son of God, who came into the world to make us, miserable sinners, happy, and by thy mediation, to reconcile heaven and earth. O blessed Lord and Saviour! make us also true Christians, and adopted sons of God, that we may likewise confess the truth with boldness. Deliver from the snares of satan all those who are yet entangled in them; discover their na-

kedness to those who still rest in mere external performances, or despise thy gospel, that they may be forced, like death-devoted sinners, to fly to thy merits, and with tears of repentance, to seek thy righteousness. Draw every penitent soul to thyself; irradiate it with the comforts which flow from thy condemnation and sufferings. Preserve, O Lord, by thy grace, all those who have hitherto served thee in sincerity and truth, and grant that they may remain faithful unto death. Finally, be pleased to bless every truth which has been here delivered, to the eternal glory of thy name, and the salvation of our souls. Amen.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

PART II.

OF THE

SUFFERINGS

OF

CHRIST

BEFORE THE CIVIL TRIBUNAL OF PILATE AND
HEROD.

The accounts given by the four Evangelists, (Matt. xxvii. 1—30. Mark xv. 1—19. Luke xviii. 1—25. John xviii. 28. and xix. 16. connected and harmonised.

‘AND the whole multitude of them arose, and bound Jesus, and led him from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor: And it was early in the morning.

‘Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went out and hanged himself. And the chief Priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field to bury strangers in: Wherefore that field was called the field of blood unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did va-

lue, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

‘And the chief Priests themselves went out into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring you against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.

‘And Jesus stood before the governor. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, That he himself is Christ a king. Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? thine own nation, and the chief Priests have delivered thee unto me: What hast thou done?

‘Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: But now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

‘Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out unto the Jews, and saith unto the chief Priests and the people, I find no fault in this man. And the chief Priests were the more fierce. And when he was accused of the chief Priests

and Elders, he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him, Answerest thou nothing? behold, hearest thou how many things they witness against thee? Jesus answered him to never a word; in so much that the governor marvelled greatly.

‘ And the chief Priests said, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked, Whether the man were a Galilean? And as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: For he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but Jesus answered him nothing. And the chief Priests and Scribes stood, and vehemently accused him. And Herod and his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him; and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate: And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity betwixt themselves.

‘ And Pilate, when he had called together the chief Priests and rulers, and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people: And behold, I having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod: For I sent you to him, and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him; I will therefore chastise him, and release him: Now at the feast of the Passover, the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. Therefore, of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast. And there was one named Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, who lay bound with them that had

made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.

‘ And when they were gathered together, Pilate saith unto them, Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the Passover. Then the multitude crying aloud, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief Priests had delivered him for envy. And when he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: For I have suffered many things this day in a dream, because of him. But the chief Priests and Elders persuaded the multitude, that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. Then they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release Barabbas: Now Barabbas was a robber.

‘ Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, saith again to them, What will ye that I shall do with Jesus who is called Christ, and whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they all cried out, Crucify him! Crucify him! And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. But they cried out the more exceedingly, Let him be crucified! and they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified: And the voices of them and of the chief Priests prevailed. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus unto their will.

‘ Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers of the governor led Jesus away into the common hall, and they called together

the whole band. And they stripped him, and clothed him with a purple robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it about his head, and a reed in his right hand ; and they mocked him, and began to salute him, saying, Hail King of the Jews ! And they did spit upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head, and bowing the knee, worshipped him : And they smote him with their hands.

‘ Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold I bring him forth unto you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man ! When the chief Priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him ! Crucify him ! Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him ; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.

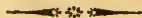
‘ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid ; and he went again into the judgment-hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou ? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me ? Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee ? Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above : Therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

‘ And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him : But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend : Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment-seat, in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the Pass-over, and about the sixth hour : And he saith unto

the Jews, Behold your king ! But they cried out, Away with him ! Away with him ! Crucify him ! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king ? The chief Priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person ; See ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children ! Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified.'

THE PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O MY Saviour ! who art inexpressibly great and glorious, and hast been appointed by God to be the judge of quick and dead ; who, in the days of thy humility and suffering, didst permit thy sacred person to be led from one unrighteous judge to another, and every where by thy discourse, thy silence, and the sanctity of thy behaviour, didst shew thyself the immaculate Lamb of God ; Bless the consideration of the sufferings which thou didst patiently endure before the civil tribunal, that our souls may thereby be abundantly edified, and by the concurrence of thy grace, may be so awakened, that by our sincere endeavours to be partakers of the fruits of thy sufferings we may enjoy the benefit of them both in life and death. And as the account of thy unspeakable sufferings is singular and surprising beyond all other events recorded in history ; Be pleased, O Lord, to crown the consideration of them with a singular blessing, for the sake of thy holy name. Amen.



CONSIDERATION I.

CHRIST DELIVERED UP TO PILATE THE CIVIL JUDGE.

'AND the whole multitude of them arose, and bound Jesus, and led him from Caiaphas unto the

hall of judgment, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor: And it was early in the morning,' (Matt. xxvii. 1, 2. Mark xv. 1. Luke xxiii. 1. John xviii. 28.)

In these words we have an account of the delivering up the Lord Jesus to Pilate, the civil judge.

Hitherto the Saviour of mankind had stood before the ecclesiastical court of the Jews. The great council had examined him about midnight, at the house of Caiaphas the High Priest; had suborned false witnesses against him; and lastly, on his owning himself, when interrogated by them, to be the Messiah and the Son of God, had condemned him to die as a blasphemer. On this, that iniquitous court was adjourned; and the chief Priests and Elders separated, leaving the condemned Jesus in the merciless hands of the officers and servants, who spent the remainder of the night in committing all manner of insults and outrages against his sacred person. But as soon as the day began to dawn, the members of the great council met again in the High Priest's palace, to consult what further measures were to be taken, and the most convenient method of putting the sentence they had passed on Jesus in execution. It was hereupon resolved to deliver him up very early in the morning to Pilate the civil governor, that he might be crucified after the Roman manner. For this end, they ordered the Lord of Glory to be again brought before the council, and asked him whether he persisted in his former declaration, and professed himself to be the Son of God. This true and infallible Witness having again confirmed what he had before asserted, they also on their part confirmed the sentence of death passed on him; and now they gave orders for delivering up Jesus to the governor, who was invested with the executive power. This is the important transaction which is so circumstantially related in the above accounts of the four Evangelists, connected and harmonised.

In this narrative is mentioned,

First, The person whom the Jews delivered up to Pilate. This was Jesus, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, the universal Saviour of all nations; who hitherto had gone about doing good, all over Judea, relieving and healing both Jews and Gentiles, that were tormented by the devil, and afflicted with various diseases and infirmities. That Jesus was delivered up as a malefactor to the Gentiles, of whom it is said, 'His fame went out through all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them,' (Matth. iv. 24.) That benevolent Jesus, of whom it is farther said, by another Evangelist, (Mark vi. 55, 56.) 'They ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch, if it were but the border of his garment: And as many as touched him were made whole.' That meek Jesus, who, before, had been delivered up by the traitor Judas, into the hands of the Jewish Ecclesiastical Judges who sat in Moses's seat, is now by those iniquitous judges delivered up to the civil power.

Secondly, The persons who led our blessed Saviour away are here specified. 'And the whole multitude of them arose,' (Luke xxiii. 1.) When the black design of apprehending the blessed Jesus at the Mount of Olives had been concerted, only some few of the members of the great council went as deputies to assist in that transaction: but when Christ was to be delivered up to Pilate, not one of them was willing to stay behind; for they all unanimously determined to accompany him to the judg-

ment-hall. As for the persons of whom this multitude consisted, St. Mark informs us, that they were the Chief Priests, with the Elders and Scribes,' (chap. xv. 1.); so that this iniquitous procedure was authorised and carried on by the chiefs, and most considerable persons, of the whole Jewish nation.

Of the Jewish clergy, there were present the High Priest; and, according to St. Matthew's account, (chap. xxvii. 1.) all the Chief Priests; not only Caiaphas the High Priest for that year, but likewise other persons of distinguished rank, who had filled that dignity, or were chiefs of the four and twenty orders of Priests.

As for the laity, the Elders of the people were present; who superintended the political and civil affairs of the Jewish people, in subordination to the Roman governor.

Besides these, some of the Scribes assisted; who were persons that acted both as laymen and ecclesiastics, and were consulted in religious as well as civil matters. For the Jewish religion, as well as the Jewish polity, was grounded on the law of Moses. Hence they who studied the law, and had attained to a competent knowledge of it, were consulted in all cases of conscience, and likewise in civil disputes; so that the Scribes were, indeed, the great luminaries of the Jewish church and state. The Chief Priests, by their presence, imparted the greatest authority and importance to this mixed multitude. They took along with them the Elders of the people, that from their experience in judicial proceedings, they might the better execute the resolution they had taken of accusing the innocent Jesus before Pilate, as a person guilty of sedition, and other crimes against the state. The Scribes were also necessary for carrying on this iniquitous prosecution, that by their skill in the Mosaical law, they might silence the prisoner Jesus of Nazareth, if he should offer to

start any dispute about the law before Pilate. Such was their artifice and precaution, in executing the plot they had formed of destroying our blessed Lord.

But that these venerable chiefs of the Jewish nation should take the trouble of delivering Jesus up to Pilate with their own hands, and walk in procession with him, when other malefactors were only sent to the governor by their officers, was, indeed, something very extraordinary ; but for this method of proceeding they had weighty motives. By their presence, their design was to keep the people in awe, lest any attempt should be made by the way to rescue Jesus out of the hands of the officers, and to set him at liberty. Besides, they intended to move Pilate to comply with their desires by their personal appearance, which might induce him, without any farther enquiry, immediately to order the execution of a sentence, which had been pronounced by an assembly composed of persons eminent for their sanctity, wisdom, and knowledge of the law : so that the governor might be assured, that they had acted in the affair according to the dictates of their consciences, and the best of their knowledge. These were their motives for their associating with the officers of justice and executioners, and personally conveying Jesus before the temporal judge. We may conclude that great numbers of the common people (some of whom had already got together in Caiaphas's palace, and others by the way) had joined this extraordinary procession.

Thirdly, We have here an account of the manner of leading our blessed Saviour to Pilate. St. Matthew says, ' When they had bound him, they led him away.' Jesus was led away bound : he had been already bound in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was first apprehended, and then sent in bonds from Annas to Caiaphas, (John xviii. 10, 24.) As mention is here made again of binding Jesus, it is

probable that his bonds were taken off when he was again interrogated the next morning, whether he persisted in his former declaration, that this repeated acknowledgement, after his bonds were taken off, might appear to be free and voluntary, not extorted by fear and violence. Being now on his repeated confession a second time sentenced to death, his beneficent hands were again bound behind his back, and a chain or cord fastened about his neck and body; and thus was he brought to Pilate as one appointed to die. But at the same time, it is not improbable, that the Lord Jesus had been kept bound ever since he had been apprehended in the garden on the Mount of Olives; but that, as he was to be led along the streets to Pilate's house, they bound him faster, and with stronger cords, lest he should attempt to escape, or the people offer to rescue him by the way. O ye blind guides! ye senseless miscreants! to imagine you can bind the Almighty. If the person thus bound would have used his matchless strength, he could have broken all your bonds asunder, much easier than Samson did the cords with which his countrymen bound him, in order to deliver him up to the idolatrous Philistines, (Judg. xv. 13, 14.) But his love withheld his Omnipotence: It was this that made him willing to obey his Father, by submitting not only to chains, but to death; even the death of the Cross.

Fourthly, Mention is here made of the place whither our blessed Saviour was led. 'They led him from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment, (John xviii. 28.) Thus he was carried out of the High Priest's house, where sentence of death had been pronounced upon him, and led away to the judgment-hall, i. e. to the palace, where the Roman governor generally used to hold his court of judicature. This, according to some commentators, was near Antonius's castle, and for its spaciousness and elegance exceeded all other palaces in the city; especially as it stood on so high

a foundation, that there was an ascent to it of eight and-twenty marble steps.

Fifthly, The person to whom the Lord Jesus is delivered is here specified. He is described both by his office or dignity, and his name.

As to the former he is stiled the governor i. e. a person appointed by the Roman emperor to govern a province subject to the Empire, in the quality of the Emperor's Lieutenant. This governor was not only to take account of the Emperor's revenues; but likewise, when no superior judge was present, to administer justice even in criminal cases, and to see that the sentence of death, &c. was put in execution.

The name of this governor or vice-gerent was Pontius Pilate; a name not unknown in the Roman history, and mentioned in one of St. Paul's Epistles, (1 Tim. vi. 13.) and afterwards inserted in the Apostles' Creed. This person was sent to Judea to be governor of that province of the Roman empire in the thirteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, and was the fifth in succession of those who had been invested with this new dignity. That he not only received the imperial revenue as treasurer, but had likewise the power of putting capital sentences in execution, appears both from the history of those times, and from his own words to Christ, namely, 'Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? (John xix. 10.) This Pilate bears a very infamous character in history for his flagrant injustice, insatiable avarice, and barbarous cruelty; and among other crimes, is charged with receiving bribes, and even with having put to death several innocent persons without any previous trial. If, in our blessed Saviour's case, he at first made some show of equity and regard to justice, and not only gave our blessed Lord a full hearing, but for some time stood out against the unjust clamours of the great council of the Jews; this must be attributed to the hand of God, which, for a while, restrain-

ed this rigorous and cruel judge, (who had ordered the execution of so many just persons without any enquiry into their case) that the innocence of Jesus might be manifested at his tribunal, a manifestation in which the whole race of mankind was so nearly concerned. In other cases Pilate's natural disposition disposed him to injustice and cruelty, to condemn the innocent, and to permit all kind of barbarities to be practised on them.

But here it may be proper to enquire, What could move the Jewish Sanhedrim, which, at other times, had such an aversion to the Roman governor, to deliver up Jesus to Pontius Pilate? and why they did not put the sentence they had passed on Jesus in execution, as they did afterwards in the case of St. Stephen the Protomartyr? (Acts vii.) To this it may be answered, that several motives might induce the chief Priests and Scribes to use such a method of proceeding.

The first and principal cause of this uncommon procedure was unquestionably the extreme malice, and implacable hatred, which the Jewish judges bore to the sacred person of the Lord Jesus. For they thought all the capital punishments used among the Jews, were too mild and favourable for such an execrable malefactor. They chose therefore that he should die by a painful and ignominious crucifixion; and that consequently, a person put to such an accursed death might be rendered an execrable object of abhorrence to all the Jewish people, then present at the feast or the Passover; so that no one might hereafter venture to profess a belief in Jesus, or speak favourably of him or his doctrine.

The second motive to this action was their fear of the populace. Of this apprehension they had, the day before, given a sufficient intimation, by saying, 'Not on the feast, lest there be an uproar amongst the people,' (Matt. xxvi, 5.) They justly concluded, that if any tumult should happen to arise on this

occasion, Pilate had his Roman garrison ready at hand, which would soon have quelled any insurrection. They likewise considered, that by this proceeding they should be better able to justify themselves to the people, and to throw all the blame on the Roman governor. Hence we find, that they afterwards highly resented it, when the Apostles reproached them to their faces with having killed the Prince of Life, (Acts iii. 15.) and complained that the blood of that Person was, by the disciples, wrongly imputed to them, whom they charged with having unjustly shed it, (Acts v. 28.)

We are informed in the third place, that their hypocritical sanctity, as the feast of the Passover was already begun, did not allow them to execute the sentence of death ; which, however, would by no means induce them to put it off till after the feast of the Passover. These were the principal motives that induced the chief Priests, &c. to deliver Jesus to the heathen governor.

But the over-ruling cause of this transaction was the wise and secret decree of God ; for St. Peter informs us, that Jesus was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God into wicked hands, which crucified him, (Acts ii. 23.) Thus God was pleased to permit what now happened.

1. That the types and prophecies, expressive of this circumstance of our Saviour's passion, might be fulfilled. Hereby were to be accomplished, the type exhibited by Joseph, whom his invidious brethren sold and delivered up to foreigners, (Gen. xxxvii. 28.) the type of Samson, who was delivered up by his own people to the uncircumcised Philistines, (Judges xv. 12,) the type of Jonah who was thrown out of the ship, and given up to the raging waves of the sea, (Jonah 15.) Not only the types, but also several prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled by this transaction. Here Jews and Gentiles conspired against Christ the Anointed of the Lord,

(Psalm ii. 1, 2.) Here the Messiah is surrounded with blood-thirsty dogs, (Psalm xxii. 16.) Here came to pass what our blessed Lord had, some time before, declared to his disciples in these words : ' The Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief Priests, and Scribes, and they shall deliver him up to the Gentiles,' (Matt. xx. 18, 19.) By this circumstance therefore the veracity of God was eminently displayed.

2. That the innocence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ might be rendered more conspicuous, and manifested to the world. Had our blessed Lord been immediately dragged out of the Sanhedrim, and tumultuously stoned, as it happened in the case of Stephen, his innocence would not have appeared in so conspicuous a light. But now he is delivered to an austere judge, who, after the most careful scrutiny and strictest examination, repeatedly declares in the ears of all the Jewish nation, ' I find no fault in this man.' Thus the spotless innocence of Christ, after it had been suppressed and traduced before the spiritual judges, was the more gloriously manifested before the civil tribunal.

3. That the measure of our Saviour's sufferings might be completely filled up. Had Jesus, as I observed above, been immediately stoned as a blasphemer, he would quickly have passed from death unto life. But now, as he was to be crucified after the Roman manner, his death was preceded by a painful scourging, and a series of indignities and insults. Besides, this kind of death was of such a nature, that the innocent and sacred blood of Christ, appointed as a ransom for our sins, was most profusely shed ; which could not have properly happened by any punishment usually inflicted by the Jews.

4. The Lord Jesus was delivered up to the Gentiles, that by this a foundation might be laid for the salvation of all people, and that Jews and heathens might be made partakers of the merits acquired by the sufferings of Jesus Christ. This victim was to

be the 'propitiation for the sins of the whole world,' (1 John ii. 2.) To render this glorious truth more worthy of belief, God was pleased to permit the Jews and Gentiles to stain their hands with this sacred blood, and that the heathens should put the finishing hand to those sufferings, which the Jews had already begun to inflict. The High Priest was the chief or head of the whole Jewish nation; and Pilate the governor was the representative of the Roman emperor, the supreme head of the whole world at that time. Thus the blessed Jesus was to be accused and condemned before the supreme spiritual court of the Jews, and before the civil tribunal of the heathen governor, that both Jews and Gentiles might be convinced that they were guilty of his blood; but, at the same time, as they were equally guilty, so they might equally stand in need of, and be entitled alike to, pardoning grace. Oh, what a reviving consolation is this for us Gentiles! and how mortifying a consideration to the self-convicted, unrepenting Jews!

Sixthly, and Lastly, The harmonised text recited above, informs us of the time when the Lord Jesus was delivered up. St. John observes that it was early, i. e. about six of the clock in the morning, according to our division of the day. In such haste were these blood-thirsty men for bringing this immaculate Lamb to the slaughter. Early in the morning, when they ought to have been at their morning devotions, or in the temple, and preparing themselves for the celebration of the Passover, they are taken up with the thoughts of blood-shed and murder. O degenerate progeny of Abraham! He rose early in the morning to bring his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord, in obedience to his command, (Gen. xxii. 3.) whereas these miscreants are up early to sacrifice the only Son of God to their malice and rancour. Here was exhibited the following description, which the prophet Zephaniah gives of the judges of the Messiah, 'They rose early, and corrupted all their doings,' (chap. iii.

7.) This early delivering up of the Lord Jesus was chiefly the effect of their execrable malice, and inveterate hatred; which had been hitherto restrained from breaking out by their fear of the people, but now, like an impetuous torrent, breaks through and overflows its banks with the greater rapidity. Such was the impatience of this savage multitude, that they would not allow the blessed Jesus one hour after he was condemned, to prepare for death, an indulgence usually granted to all other malefactors; but they longed to see him fastened to the Cross without any delay. This precipitancy was likewise an effect of their cunning; for by this hurry, they intended to anticipate the assembling of the people in a tumultuous manner, or the intervening of other affairs which might divert Pilate from putting the unjust sentence in execution. These are the six remarkable circumstances in the leading away of our blessed Lord, and delivering him to the civil judge, as related in the harmonised account which we have quoted above. We shall now, from every one of these circumstances, draw the following salutary doctrines for our edification.

From the first circumstance, relating to the person who was delivered up, this truth may be learned, viz. That the Holy One, by permitting himself to be delivered up to the hands of the uncircumcised, has himself taken away the reproach of our spiritual uncircumcision, and gained for us Gentiles a right to be denizens of Israel. To die by the hands of the uncircumcised was in the Old Testament, accounted an accursed death, (Ezek. xxxii. 19.) Accordingly Samson makes this bitter complaint: 'Lord, thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant; and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised,' (Judges xv. 18.)? Nay, King Saul chose rather to fall by his own sword, than to be taken prisoner and insulted by the uncircumcised, (1 Sam. xxxi. 4.)

And here the most sacred and glorious person that ever was on earth suffers himself to be delivered into the hands of the uncircumcised, in order thereby to atone for the uncircumcision of our hearts, which is so odious in the sight of God; and to acquire for us Gentiles a participation of the privileges of the people of God, and admission into the covenant of Grace, of which circumcision was once the seal. By this our blessed Saviour also sanctifies the sufferings of his members; who afterwards, during the persecutions of the Roman Emperors, were brought before Pagan Governors, Judges, and Rulers of provinces, to hear the sentence of death pronounced on them.

From the second circumstance, namely, the persons who delivered Jesus up, we shall make the following observation. The clergy and laity joined hand in hand to promote our Saviour's death, which fore-shewed how the members and professors of Jesus Christ would be treated in the kingdom of Antichrist. As the Jewish Sanhedrim, after passing the sentence of death on our blessed Lord, applied to the civil power to put this unjust sentence in execution; so has it been the constant practice of anti-christian churches. When the witnesses of the Truth have been declared Heretics, and been sentenced to die, and, if they happen to be of the clerical order, have been degraded, and stripped of their sacerdotal vestments: they are then delivered up to the civil power. At the same time, they make an hypocritical request to the magistrate, to proceed against the criminal with mildness and clemency; but privately instigate him to use the devouring sword, and rid the church of a rotten member. Thus John Huss and other blessed martyrs were treated by their persecutors, and, in this particular, were made like to the illustrious Chief of all confessors of the truth. The Lord Jesus was delivered up as a transgressor of both Tables of the Law. The

care of the first Table peculiarly belonged to the spiritual court; and the civil power took cognizance of the breach of the second. Now, as our Saviour was tried before both Tribunals, he seemed in appearance to have transgressed both Tables of the Law. Thus by the abundant merit of this part of his sufferings, he has atoned for our transgressions of the first and second Tables, and obtained forgiveness for us upon our sincere repentance.

From the third circumstance, namely the manner of their leading away our blessed Lord, we may learn, That by the bonds of Jesus Christ, in which he was delivered up to his judges, an exemption is obtained for repenting sinners, that they may not be delivered up to the powers of darkness. This procedure against the Lord Jesus would, otherwise, have taken place against us. We were to have been loaded with chains and bonds, and delivered up to the prince of darkness, that the judgment of eternal death which the Divine justice had pronounced against us, as transgressors of God's commands, might one day be executed on us. But this sacred person having interposed, and suffered himself to be brought bound before the Judge, hath loosened the bonds of all those who believe on his name, and repent of their evil doings.

From the fourth circumstance, viz. The place whither Christ was brought, we may learn, That it is no new thing for the seat of judgment, which ought to be an assylum to the innocent, to become the engine of injustice, by the corruption of human nature. This is not an abuse of a modern date, but was in vogue so early as our Saviour's time, and even so early as that of Solomon, who complains of it in Ecclesiastes, (chap. iii. 16.) 'And moreover, I saw under the Sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.' Therefore, if we often see justice no better administered in our

days, this melancholy sight should by no means prompt us to deny Divine Providence : On the contrary, we should rather calm our troubled minds, by reflecting that the Son of God, who is appointed to be the supreme Judge of the quick and dead, himself in his sacred person felt the effects of injustice ; and by that means, has cleared the way for his followers that they should not stumble at this rock of offence. Besides, a day of judgment will come, when all the proceedings of judicatures will be canvassed anew, and every act of injustice will receive its due reward. To this Solomon alludes in the above cited passage, where he adds, ‘ Then I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked ; for there is a time for every purpose,’ (Eccles. iii. 17.)

From the fifth circumstance, concerning the person to whom Christ was led and delivered up, we may learn, That it is our Saviour’s going from one unrighteous judge to another, that we owe our discharge at the righteous tribunal of God. It was certainly not without design that Jesus was led from one iniquitous judicature to another, from the Sanhedrim to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, and from Herod back again to Pilate ; for, by these afflictive circumstances he has obtained for us a discharge from that dreadful sentence, ‘ Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire.’ The blessed Jesus knows by cruel experience, how it must affect an innocent person to be brought before unrighteous judges ; and therefore, every afflicted and persecuted Christian may confide in him, and be assured that such sufferings will not escape his observation, and will one day be abundantly rewarded. Happy are we in having such a Saviour, Redeemer, and Judge ! Let us willingly devote ourselves to the service of Him, to whom we owe our deliverance and freedom. But whosoever abuses this favour of liberty and discharge, and will not, while he is on the way, reconcile himself to God by faith and repentance, will one day be delivered up to the judge ; and the

judge will deliver him up to the officer, to be cast into an everlasting prison, from whence there is no release, (Matt. v. 25.)

Lastly, The sixth circumstance which I have taken notice of above, namely, the time when Jesus was led away, reminds us of this truth, That the early suffering of the Lord Jesus has atoned for our early sins, if duly repented of. Alas! how often does the rising sun behold us in the actual commission of wicked actions, or at least taken up with wicked thoughts, and impious devices? And how many grievous sins have we committed in our early years, in the morning of our lives, any one of which is sufficient to condemn us? But that we may not come into condemnation, the Son of God, by his early sufferings, when the rising sun beheld his sacred face buffeted and spit upon, and his benificent hands bound with cords, has expiated our early sins, with the transgressions and offences of our youth, and has acquired forgiveness of sins to all those who have faith in his name, and repentance towards God. O let us then praise him betimes for his early sufferings! This consideration should rouse us from our beds at the dawn of day, and bring us on our knees to offer up orisons and praise to him, who so early suffered for us; should animate us against the least delay of turning to God; should powerfully incite us to dedicate the morning of our lives to the honour of God, and to give up our souls and bodies to his service, who hath loved us unto death.

THE PRAYER.

O MOST holy and most gracious God! all praise be ascribed to thee, for giving up the Son of thy love to be judged before so many tribunals, that he might experience every afflictive and painful circumstance, and be an example for our imitation in all kinds of sufferings. Make us, we beseech thee, partakers of all the benefits purchased by the sufferings of thy

dear Son. Excite us all to a sincere and effectual repentance, that none of us may put off his conversation; and that those, who are yet in the morning of their lives, may not waste their youth and strength in the service of satan, but rouse themselves from their lethargy, and come to him who can wash and purify them from their sins. Grant, O Lord, that those who have already devoted themselves to the service of thy Son may, from the circumstances of his sufferings now considered, find their souls refreshed with new light and consolation, for the sake of thine everlasting love, and infinite mercy. Amen.



CONSIDERATION II.

THE TRAGICAL EXIT OF THE TRAITOR JUDAS.

‘Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went out and hanged himself. And the chief Priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them in the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field to bury strangers in: Wherefore that field was called the field of blood unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ‘They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me,’ (Matt. xxvii. 3—10.)

St. Matthew, as we have observed in the preceding Consideration, had, in the first and second verse of

this chapter, begun to relate how the Lord Jesus was led away from the spiritual to the civil judicature. But, before he proceeds in the narrative, he makes a digression to inform us of what had happened to Judas, who had betrayed our blessed Lord. For as he was one of the chief instruments that satan made use of to promote the sufferings of Christ, the whole church was concerned to know what became of this son of perdition. St. Matthew therefore gives us a particular account of his end, as a warning to those, who, against their consciences, and the clearest conviction, should oppose Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world to save sinners.

In the above narrative, we have an account of the tragical exit of the traitor Judas; in which we shall observe,

First, What preceded that catastrophe.

Secondly, The means he made use of to put an end to his life.

Thirdly, What followed after his death.

I. Here is related what happened before this catastrophe, both with regard to the traitor himself, and also to those who had bribed him to betray his master.

As to the traitor, he was seized with an excruciating remorse, which displayed itself by several outward signs.

The remorse which Judas felt is thus described, 'Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself.' Hitherto Judas had probably flattered himself, that Jesus would have escaped out of the hands of his enemies, to whom he had sold him for thirty pieces of silver: For he had frequently with his own eyes seen Jesus pass unhurt through crouds of his enemies, and by that means disappoint their rage. For instance, St. Luke tells us, that the Nazarites 'thrust him out of their city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon the city was built, that they might cast him down headlong; but he, passing through the midst of them,

went his way, (Luke iv. 29.) And St. John informs us, that at Jerusalem, the Jews 'took up stones to cast at him : But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, through the midst of them, and so passed by,' (John viii. 59.) This our blessed Lord did, because he knew that his hour of suffering was not yet come. It was on this that Judas had presumptuously built his vain hopes ; for he did not in the least question but Jesus would again set himself at liberty, and break the bonds of his enemies ; and in the mean time, he might safely keep the thirty pieces of silver, and apply them to his own use. But such undertakings, as we imagine will be crowned with success, are often frustrated by the over-ruling providence of God. The Egyptians boldly ventured into the Red-Sea ; but were overwhelmed by the waters, and drowned, (Heb. xi. 29.)

Now, the traitor was convinced too late, that he had been mistaken in his expectation. He saw that his master was not only condemned to die by the Jewish spiritual judicature, or the great council of the Sanhedrim ; but that they were going to deliver him up to the civil power, that the Roman governor might order the sentence to be executed without delay. Upon this, his stony, obdurate heart, which hitherto had been untouched, began to relent. His conscience, which had been insensible, and, as it were, overpowered by a lethargic stupidity, began now to awake with loud incessant clamours, and to represent to him the heinousness of his atrocious crime. The innocence of the blessed Jesus, the innumerable kindnesses which he had received from him, the timely admonitions given him against this base ingratitude, the approaching ignominious and excruciating death which he foresaw his master was to suffer, the contempt and detestation which all the disciples and followers of Christ would be filled with against him, as the chief promoter of his death ; and the everlasting punishment which would be the consequence of such

execrable perfidiousness and treachery, presented themselves at once in a dismal group to his distracted mind, and threw all the faculties and passions of his soul into the utmost perturbation. He now wished, but wished in vain, that he had never engaged in this horrid plot; and, if it had not been carried on too far to be recalled, he would fain have prevented it. That this remorse of Judas did not consist merely in unactive thoughts, which rose up spontaneously in his mind and then subsided, like bubbles on the water; but that it was a very painful and heart-felt sensation, an insupportable reflection on what he had done, and proceeded from an awakened and irritated conscience, appears from the signs by which it displayed itself.

First, He made a sincere confession of his crime. He went away to the chief Priests and Elders of the people, and in all appearance whilst they were yet in Caiaphas's palace, but preparing, after they had passed sentence on our blessed Lord, to lead him to Pilate. Some time before, he came to the chief Priests and put this question to them, 'What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you,' (Matt. xxvi. 14, 15.) But now he comes to acknowledge with grief and sorrow of heart, that he had greatly sinned, and acted a very perfidious, wicked part: 'I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' In these words he makes a confession of the heinousness of his own guilt, and his master's spotless innocence, whose blood he terms 'the innocent blood.' By this confession, he openly arraigns the judgment of the Sanhedrim, and contradicts the sentence they had passed on our blessed Lord, namely, 'He is worthy of death.' Probably, he had some hopes that the chief Priests and Elders, upon hearing this, would relent, and be moved to revoke the unjust sentence they had pronounced, and to set his master at liberty. But it happened here, according to the saying of Balaam, (Job viii. 13.) that the hope of the hypocrite perished.

Secondly, after this confession, he returned the money which he had received as a bribe to induce him to perpetrate this atrocious crime. 'He brought again the thirty pieces of silver.' As yet, he had them all in his hands, and as he had received them from the chief Priests, he brings them the money again. This money, which before had given him so much joy, was now an insupportable burden to his conscience. He could not bear to carry it about him, but brought it again to those from whom it came, and without doubt he wished, at the same time, that as he returned them the pieces of silver, they likewise would restore liberty to our blessed Saviour, Nay, when they refused to take the money again, and were rising up, and hastening to Pilate, Judas made the best of his way to the Temple, and casting down the pieces of silver not far from the treasury, left them there. Thus impatient was the traitor to get rid of this price of innocent blood, hoping by that means, in some measure, to ease his burdened conscience. These are the two outward signs by which Judas evidenced the reality of his sorrow and remorse. But if we examine more narrowly into all the circumstances attending this sorrow of Judas, it will appear to have such additional marks of sincerity as may put thousands of Christians to the blush.

1. For he is sensible of the crime which he had committed, and, from the conviction of an awakened conscience, accuses himself.

2. He confesses his sin. He does not say in general terms, I have sinned ; but descends to particulars, specifies his crime, and owns himself guilty of treachery and blood-shed.

3. He does not make this confession of his guilt in an obscure or private place ; but openly, in the presence of the elders and chief Priests, whose chief instrument he had been in apprehending our blessed Saviour, and thereby had given the offence.

4. He does not in the least attempt to palliate, justify, or extenuate his sin, or to throw the blame on others; but peremptorily accuses himself as a vile criminal.

5. He hates and detests himself on this account, and shews an abhorrence of his late impious proceeding.

6. His heart is full of sorrow, and painful remorse; he wishes that the atrocious act had never been committed.

7. He addresses himself to those persons, whose province it was to give spiritual counsel and advice, and to administer comfort to the members of the Jewish Church, who applied to them for direction, in difficult cases of conscience.

8. He is for restoring to his master the honour of which he had robbed him, by declaring him an innocent person.

9. He also restores to the chief Priests the money which he had received from them, and will by no means keep the reward of his iniquity.

10. Lastly, He is desirous of obliterating the offence which he had given; and, by declaring Jesus to be innocent, to withhold his enemies from incurring any farther guilt.

These, indeed, are signs and tokens of which there is not the least appearance in the superficial repentance of many thousands of sinners, who call themselves Christians. How inconsiderable a figure do the signs of repentance, even in many who would pass for very devout persons, make, when compared with these? How deficient are they in a thorough conviction of their sins, and a candid confession of them? They, indeed, make little difficulty of acknowledging, that they are poor sinners; but to own themselves guilty of this or that particular sin, though notoriously practised by them, is what their haughty spirits cannot stoop to. And whatever they may say in their

prayers; yet, if they do not absolutely deny before the world those sins they are taxed with, they are very ingenious in excusing, palliating, or covering their sins under the softer name of human foibles. Therefore, they have no hearty contrition for their wickedness, no sincere aversion against sin. The careless soul feels nothing of inward remorse, contrition, and sorrow. The mouth may say, I am sorry and repent for my past sins, which are many and great, &c. but the heart flatly contradicts these professions, and continues presumptuous and unmortified. The lethargic conscience still sleeps on. Instead of resolving to restore ill-gotten wealth, they persevere in a course of extortion, rapine, and injustice; and accumulate offences, by adding sin to sin. Therefore it is much to be feared, that this sorrow of Judas will, at the last day, shame many thousands of nominal Christians, and condemn their cold, superficial repentance, which never affected the obdurate heart.

But some may object 'If Judas was such a sincere and contrite penitent, why was not mercy shewn him? Peter, who had acted a much baser part; who, with horrid oaths and imprecations, had denied the blessed Jesus; and whose repentance was not accompanied with such public and extraordinary signs of his sincerity, obtained forgiveness: Whereas the unhappy Judas is given up to such insupportable despair, that he puts an end to his wretched life? What could he have done more? what greater signs could have been required of him, to demonstrate the sincerity of his remorse and penitential sorrow? such, alas! is the depravity of our hearts, that from an ill-timed pity, and false compassion for Judas, we are inclined to excuse the traitor, and censure Christ with rigour and partiality. But, on a more attentive consideration of Judas's sorrow, we shall observe in it the following faults and imperfections, to which the rejection of his repentance may be reasonably imputed.

1. Judas's acknowledgement of his sin was not a confession of the right kind. His eyes were not illuminated by the light of grace, to see the inward heinousness and detormity of his crime. He only considered the mere outward fact ; and did not ascend to the fountain from whence his treachery sprung, namely, his detestable avarice ; much less did he go to the primary source of his corruption.

2. He, indeed, made a declaration of his sin before men ; but we do not read of any confession he made to God, though it was that all-perfect Being, whom he had most offended.

3. His trouble and anguish entirely proceeded from wrong causes. He was afraid of being hated and despised for his infamous treachery, by all who had any sense of virtue. He was not so much affected with sorrow for the sin which he had committed, as for the infamy and disgrace which he had drawn on himself, by his execrable perfidy ; and consequently his sorrow was not a godly, but a worldly sorrow, (2 Cor. vii. 10.) He was not sorry that he had offended God ; but that he had made himself a base tool, and merited the infamy due to his treachery. It was not so much the heinous crime which he had committed that troubled him, as the unfortunate consequences of it. Had Jesus extricated himself from the hands of his enemies, Judas would have been very easy about his treachery ; but what troubled him was, that his wicked project had terminated contrary to his expectation.

4. He sought counsel and comfort of men, nay, of those men who were the declared enemies of Jesus Christ, and not from God, who alone can heal a wounded conscience.

5. He, indeed, gives a public testimony of his master's innocence ; but this testimony was extorted from him merely by the racking pains and insupportable reproaches of a guilty conscience. Nor did Judas sufficiently insist on the confession he made ; for he

thought no more of our Saviour's innocence, to which if he had fled for refuge, it would have been a sure asylum to him, and protected him from his fatal despair.

6. His returning the bribe, the infamous price of blood, did not proceed from any honest disdain or abhorrence of this reward of iniquity, but from self-love, and a desire of easing his oppressed conscience. Thus a master of a ship throws some part of his cargo overboard in a violent storm; but he does it with great reluctance, and only with a view to save the remainder, (Acts xxvii. 19.) Nay, Judas returned the money with precipitancy and regret. It is said, 'He cast down the money in the Temple.' Now such passionate and abrupt behaviour can never be acceptable to God, so as to atone for the commission of the crime which occasioned it.

7. There is not any hint given in the Gospel of his having sincerely humbled himself under the mighty hand of God. Instead of considering the painful remorse of his awakened conscience as the just punishment of his villainy, and patiently submitting to its corrections, he goes away in the heat of his impatience; and in his fury and despair puts an end to that life, of which he was not the master and absolute disposer.

8. His sorrow is followed by none of the genuine fruits of repentance. Here was no conflict against sin, particularly against the sins of despair and impatience. There was not the least appearance in his behaviour of forming new purposes of real amendment of life, and much less of a total change of the temper and dispositions of the heart.

9. In the whole account of the traitor's sorrow and remorse there is not a single word about prayer, without which repentance can never attain to a real maturity: for it is a grace to be obtained of God by prayer. He did not betake himself to the temple to pray, but only to cast down the thirty pieces of sil-

ver, which gave him great uneasiness while he kept them in his possession.

10. Lastly, His repentance wanted the chief requisite and most essential part, namely, a filial confidence in the infinite mercy of God; so that for the sake of the Messiah, who had been long promised, he, though a notorious sinner, might have obtained mercy, pardon, and forgiveness. On the contrary, his gloomy distracted mind has quite a different cast; he at once cuts off all hopes of mercy, and, by his despair, offends God even more than by his former sin. These were the principal defects in Judas's repentance, to which the rejection of it may be attributed. Hence it is evident, that he not only wanted faith, but that his repentance also was not of the right kind, which is productive of newness of life; nor had it the necessary qualities to render it effectual. Having thus examined what happened to the traitor before the fatal catastrophe, we shall proceed, in the next place, to enquire what were the preceding circumstances with regard to those, who bribed Judas to betray his Master?

The chief Priests and Scribes were infected with the most relentless insensibility, previously to Judas's tragical end. When the traitor waited on them with his offer of delivering Jesus into their hands, they undoubtedly received him very graciously, and gave him many fair words: but now, when they had attained their wicked ends, they contemn and despise him. Nay, so far were they from speaking a comfortable word to him under his remorse and trouble that they treated him with a supercilious haughtiness, which naturally must have enlarged the wounds of his despairing mind.

This barbarous insensibility appears, first, in their shifting off the fault from themselves, by saying to the wretched Judas 'What is that to us?' We know that we have authority and power to condemn Jesus of Nazareth as a blasphemer: If thou art so weak

and of so scrupulous a conscience, as to be troubled for having delivered that criminal into our hands, thou must grieve on ; it is no concern to us. This was not unlike the impious speech of Cain, who said with the same unconcern, ' Am I my brother's keeper,' (Gen. iv. 9.) ?

Secondly, by laying the whole guilt and blame on Judas in these words, ' See thou to that.' If you have committed a fault by delivering up this man, you must take the consequences, and bear the punishment of it. Miserable comforters indeed ! they here manifestly display an obdurate heart, and a seared conscience, by their inhumanity towards a member of their own church ; one that they themselves had bribed to commit a heinous crime, and whom, on that account, they now saw in the agonies of despair. Unfaithful pastors ! careless shepherds, who had no manner of concern for a lost sheep ! But this was a just and deserved punishment on Judas for the hardness of his stony heart. He would not hear the voice of the good Shepherd, nor be brought to a better disposition by the gracious admonitions, which were directed to him the preceding night. He now, by way of punishment, falls into the hands of inhuman spiritual guides ; those false shepherds and base hirelings, who are so far from binding up his wounds and healing the stripes of his conscience, that they treat him with an exasperating haughtiness, contempt, and disdain. This is the account of what preceded the tragical end of Judas, both with regard to the traitor himself, and of those seducers who bribed him to betray our blessed Saviour.

II. As to the sad catastrophe itself, or the means he made use of to put an end to his wretched life. St. Matthew's account of it is as follows. ' He departed,' or rather withdrew to some private place, as persons labouring under any melancholy or violent depression of mind usually do ; but by so doing he entangled himself still more in the tempter's snares.

For by thus shunning the company and conversation of men, he was drawn into the company of evil spirits. The Evangelist farther adds, 'He went out, or went away,' very probably without the walls of Jerusalem, to seek a convenient place, where, by suicide, he might put an end to the inward tortures he endured from an irritated conscience. Thus the traitor went the shortest way, and hastened to perdition, (John xvii. 12.) Lastly, it is added, 'He hanged himself.' He threw himself into the abyss of despair, and became the murderer both of his body and soul. Thus he executed on himself the sentence which God himself had pronounced against man-sellers in the Old Testament: 'If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him; or selleth him; then that thief shall die,' (Deut. xxiv. 7.):

If we compare what St. Luke saith (Acts i. 18.) concerning the death of Judas, with this account, we shall find that it was followed with some very remarkable circumstances. That Evangelist tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, that 'falling headlong, or rather prone, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem.' Hence it appears, that either the halter with which he had hanged himself broke, and the body fell forward on a pointed rock, which penetrated into it, so that all the entrails gushed out; or that the traitor's body was cut down by some person passing that way, and then rolled down a precipice into a deep valley. After this, as St. Luke adds, his body burst asunder in the midst, and his bowels gushed out; like those whom the children of Judah cast down from the top of the rock, so that they were broken in pieces, (2 Chron. xxv. 12.) In this the divine law of retaliation is evidently displayed. It was but right that his bowels should gush out, who had shut up his bowels of compassion against Christ, of which the Messiah gives a hint in

the book of Psalms, (Ps. cix. 13.) Thus the perfidious Judas, after treading in the steps of Ahitophel, that treacherous counsellor of King David, came to a similar end: 'For when Ahitophel saw, that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and gat him home, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died,' (2 Sam. xvii. 23.)

III. We come, in the last place, to consider, what followed after the tragical end of Judas. The chief Priests and Scribes, after the traitor's death, consult together how to dispose of the money which Judas had cast down in the temple: And here we may observe the consultation of the Jews, and the counsel of God with regard to this particular.

The consultation of the Jews seems to have been held before the Passover: since on that day, they were too much taken up with the solemnization of that high festival to deliberate on such trifles. In this consultation it was represented, that the money could not be put into the treasury; and the proper method of laying it out was at the same time resolved upon.

Concerning the former it is said by the Evangelist, 'The chief Priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood,' i. e. money with which a man was bought, who was afterwards condemned to suffer a bloody death. Now as God in the Mosaical law, (Deut. xxiii. 18.) had forbidden the hire of a harlot, or the price of a dog to be brought into the house of the Lord, both of them being an abomination to him; so was it by no means proper, that the price of treachery and bloodshed should be brought into the holy treasury in the temple, and be applied to religious uses. Thus they abhor the fact, which they themselves had caused to be perpetrated by bribing Judas with this money. However, they all agreed that this money was to be laid out on some charitable foundation, and accordingly purchased with

it a field, which they appropriated as a burying-place for pilgrims or foreign Jews, who should happen to die at Jerusalem. For as every Jew in that city had his particular burying-place for himself and family, great difficulties often arose about interring in these private cemeteries the bodies of foreign Jews who died at Jerusalem, which happened most frequently at the time of the great feasts. The chief Priests therefore were for doing an act of charity to such strangers, by purchasing with this money a particular burying-place for them. For this purpose they agreed with a potter, who had a convenient piece of ground near the city ; and as he had already made use of the clay in the manufacture he was concerned in, he parted with the field at so low a rate as these thirty pieces of silver. Accordingly ‘ They took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field to bury strangers in.’

But St. Matthew, in his account of this transaction, has very carefully observed, that the counsel of God over-ruled the process of the Jewish council in this circumstance. It was signally displayed.

First, In the name of this field, by which the memory of this impious action of the priests and elders was to be transmitted to posterity. It was therefore by the particular appointment and direction of God that this field was not called the burying-place, but the Field of Blood, in commemoration of its being purchased with the price of blood. St. Matthew adds, ‘ Which name it retains to this day,’ i. e. to the time when that Evangelist wrote his gospel ; and undoubtedly it subsisted until the destruction of Jerusalem. This name given to the field could not but greatly disgust the chief Priests and Elders, who would much rather have had the remembrance of their wickedness buried in this place of oblivion : But this was not in their power to effect ; the hand of God being concerned in the affair. By this charitable foundation for the benefit of strangers, they purposed

to transmit their names with honour to posterity ; but God disappointed them, and so directed the tongues of men, that a name of infamy was fixed on the purchase ; which, at the the same time, was to be a standing monument of the truth of this history. For as this burying-place was called Akeldama, or the field of blood, it naturally raised a curiosity in every one, to ask the reason of imposing so improper a name on the repository of the dead ; and this was an enquiry which little redounded to the honour of the members of the Sanhedrim at that time.

Secondly, The counsel of God manifested itself more particularly in the accomplishment of the ancient prophecy, to which St. Matthew refers, when he adds, ‘ Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me,’ (Jer. xxvii. 9, 10.) This remarkable passage affords the following observations :

1. These words occur in the prophecy of Zechariah, (chap. xi. 13.) where they are connected with the prediction concerning the selling of the Messiah for thirty silver pieces. But this prophecy is by the Evangelist attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, either because Jeremiah was reckoned the first among the prophets, and on that account all the writings of the prophets collectively were called by his name ; or because this prophecy had been delivered down by oral tradition from Jeremiah, like that of Enoch, (Jude ver. 14, 15.) until at length, God thought fit to have it recorded in the canonical writings of the prophet Zechariah, who, also in other particulars, corresponds with the prophet Jeremiah. Hence some commentators observe, that it is no redundancy of speech in St. Matthew, when he says, ‘ Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying,’ as thereby he intends to shew, that Jeremiah only an-

nounced this prophecy orally, but that God had employed the prophet Zechariah to commit it to writing in the canonical books. These are the two most unexceptionable solutions of this difficulty.

2. As to the words themselves, it is to be observed, that St. Matthew does not quote them verbally, but according to the sense of them. In the prophet Zechariah, the Messiah himself is introduced speaking, and first mentioning his Heavenly Father's commands: 'The Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter.' Then follows his obedience in the performance of that command, 'And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.' As if he had said, By my secret overruling power I so directed the circumstances of this affair, that Judas should not keep the thirty pieces of silver, but throw them down in the temple; and moreover, that the chief Priests, though otherwise extremely avaricious, should not put them up again in their purses, nor deposit them in God's treasury, but purchase a piece of ground of a potter with the money. The meaning therefore of the passage in St. Matthew's gospel is this: The chief Priests and Elders took the thirty pieces of silver, which Judas had cast down in the temple, and with them bought a potter's field; as the Lord had appointed, that I, the Messiah, should conduct the affair in this manner. Now this prophecy is here, in a very wonderful manner, accomplished by Divine appointment, and all the offence removed which otherwise this whole affair might have occasioned, to the prejudice of Christ's doctrine and innocence; It being from hence clear and evident, that all fell out according to the predetermined counsel and will of God. However, the whole was conducted in such a manner, that God had no part in the wickedness of the chief Priests and Scribes, or in Judas's despair, by approving or promoting their measures; yet he so directed all circumstances, that the affair terminated conformably

to his eternal decree, as before declared and written by his prophets.

This is the account which St. Matthew gives of the dreadful exit of the treacherous Judas ; from which, in the following Consideration, we shall endeavour to make some practical and edifying observations.

THE PRAYER.

WE thank thee, O just and gracious God, that thou hast, in thy holy Word, so wisely secured us against taking offence at the Cross. Grant, O Lord, that the example of the betrayer of Jesus Christ may make a lasting impression on our souls ; and in this frightful mirror, teach us to behold the turpitude of sin, and how it plunges men by degrees into ruin and perdition. Enable us to consider, what insupportable trouble, what horrid ideas an awakened conscience can raise in the soul ; and what dreadful consequences attend sin, how inviting soever it may at first appear to the unwary sinner. Keep us, we beseech thee, from approaching too near to that venomous serpent, lest we should experience the smart of its deadly sting. May thy grace impart to us a salutary repentance, and holy sorrow ; and may the sufferings of thy dear Son create in us such a godly sorrow, as may far exceed the remorse of Judas ; a sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, never to be repented of. And when we come to know the heinousness of our sins, and hear the awakening clamours of conscience, grant that we may fly to the merits of our Mediator for refuge ; so that we may avoid the fatal rocks of despair, and happily arrive at the haven of salvation, for the sake of thine infinite love. Amen.



CONSIDERATION III.

THE TRAGICAL END OF THE TRAITOR JUDAS.

IN the last Consideration, I have discoursed on the terrible exit of the betrayer of Jesus Christ, according to the account given us by St. Matthew, (chap. xxvii. 3—10.) and considered what preceded the traitor's death, the catastrophe itself, and what followed it. At present, I shall only make some observations on this remarkable event, that it may the more conduce to our advantage.

We shall here animadvert,

First, On the traitor Judas.

Secondly, On the chief Priests and Elders.

I. The traitor Judas may be considered in three different lights.

First, As a witness of the innocence of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, As an unhappy instance of a deluded and wretched sinner.

Thirdly, As an example of despair and its fatal effects. From each of these particulars we shall draw some practical inferences for our edification.

First, Judas is to be considered as a witness of the innocence of our blessed Saviour: For his awakened conscience extorted from him this acknowledgment of it, 'I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' This testimony of Christ's innocence deserves the greater credit.

1. As it proceeds from one of his enemies, who does not speak out of favour or affection for our blessed Lord; but condemns his own black perfidy, at the same time that he acquits the blessed Jesus from all faults, and acknowledges his spotless innocence.

2. It proceeds from an enemy of Christ who, as he was one of the twelve disciples, had an opportunity

of being with his Master every day for above the space of three years, and consequently was an unexceptionable witness of all his discourses, and most secret transactions. Had not Judas made this confession, carnal reason, which is ever a declared opposer of the cross of Christ, might have thus argued: Who knows but the man might be urged by his own conscience, to discover the mystery of iniquity, hitherto concealed in the school of Jesus of Nazareth? Possibly he might have discovered, in his more private conversation with his Master, many secret crimes and pernicious designs, which were not so well known to the generality of the Jewish people; and found himself, as it were, forced by inward compunction to report them to the High Priests and Elders. But this open confession of his Master's innocence, and his own guilt, at once obviates all such unjust suspicions. Had he been privy to any criminal proceedings, any thing worthy of punishment committed by Jesus or his disciples, he would, without doubt, have made it known to the world when he saw Jesus sentenced to die, in order to justify, or at least excuse, his infamous treachery in the eyes of men. But on the contrary, he was so thoroughly convinced of the perfect innocence and sanctity of Jesus Christ, that he makes an open, voluntary acknowledgment of his own guilt, and his Master's innocence. If the good testimony a man gives in behalf of his enemy is by no means to be suspected; the testimony of an enemy, who, from a long and intimate converse, knew all the secrets of that person whom he had betrayed, must still be of greater weight.

3. The confession of Christ's innocence is still the more remarkable, as it was made before the whole Sanhedrim, or supreme council of the Jewish nation, which had condemned Jesus to die, and in the very house where they had condemned him.

4. The judges, who had condemned our blessed Lord, were not able to confute Judas's declaration of

our Saviour's innocence, or to give the traitor better information of any crime Jesus had committed, to deserve the sentence they had passed on him; but dismiss him with this insulting speech, 'What is that to us? See thou to that.' This testimony of Christ's innocence was corroborated and supported by other correspondent testimonies, that very same day: For, within a few hours, Herod, Pilate's wife, one of the robbers who were crucified with him, and the Pagan officer who stood under the Cross (persons who cannot be supposed to have spoken by any preconcerted scheme) with one mouth acknowledges our blessed Saviour's innocence; so that after Judas had in the morning of the same day, as it were, given the signal for it, one voice succeeded another in proclaiming our Lord's innocence, and confirming the testimony of Judas.

5. Lastly, Judas ratified his confession, on the very same day that he made it, by his death. As he had, by his treachery, been the occasion of passing the sentence of death on Jesus, he had nothing farther to hope or fear from his Master: On the contrary, he might have promised himself the greatest marks of favour from the enemies of Christ, had he adhered to them, and approved of their proceedings in condemning his Master to die. What motive could possibly have induced Judas to put an end to his own life, had he known Jesus to be a wicked man, and worthy of punishment? He might have extorted more money from the chief Priests, whom it highly concerned to justify the sentence they had pronounced on Jesus, if he had made discoveries of any pernicious doctrines taught in the school of Jesus, and forged tales of illegal and wicked practices transacted in private by him and his disciples. But since he goes away and puts a period to his wretched life, after this solemn declaration of his Master's innocence, it is a certain proof, that he knew no ill of him; so that our blessed Saviour's innocence, and the truth of the

Christian religion, are in some measure confirmed by Judas's suicide, as well as by the martyrdom of the other Apostles. Had Jesus been an imposter, Judas would by no means have destroyed himself; nor would the rest of the Apostles have suffered tortures and death for his sake. When these circumstances are duly weighed and considered, Judas must appear to have been one of the principal evidences, that declared the perfect innocence of our blessed Lord. Hence we may deduce the following truths:

1. That it is a wonderful instance of the infinite wisdom and power of God, so to order contingencies, that the betrayer of our blessed Saviour should give a public and unsuspected testimony of Christ's innocence. But let it by no means be concluded from this circumstance, that Judas was predestinated, or pre-ordained, to betray our blessed Lord; and that in consequence of his enormous crime, he should be induced by despair to put an end to his life, that by this dreadful catastrophe the innocence of Christ, and the truth of his doctrine, might be confirmed. We should rather conclude, that God foreseeing how Judas, from his own depravity and the instigation of the devil, would engage in such treacherous practices, did in his infinite wisdom so direct the outward circumstances of his life, that from the evil which he would have spontaneously committed, some good might accrue to the whole race of mankind; and this good would not have come to pass, had Judas's commission of the same crime been attended with any other circumstances. This method of deriving good from evil, without being an accomplice in the guilt, is a miracle of Divine wisdom. Hence we may form some idea of the motive, which induced our blessed Lord to admit into the number of his twelve disciples this Judas, whose treachery he foresaw, and by that means to give him an opportunity of being daily with him, and to be privy to all his proceedings; so that this was done, that his subsequent testimony

of Christ's innocence might carry the greater force with it. Let every one therefore, both in surveying his own life and the lives of others, observe how frequently God, in his infinite wisdom, has caused good to proceed out of evil; as an expert chemist, by a skilful process, extracts the noblest medicines from rank poisons. But God forbid! that any one should from this consideration think it lawful to do evil, that good may come of it; for of such, St. Paul declares the condemnation to be just, (Rom. iii. 8.)

A rational, speculative, and full conviction of the innocence of the suffering Jesus, is not sufficient to shield us from the wrath of God, and the sentence of condemnation due to sin. Alas! what did it avail the wretched Judas, that he was convinced of Christ's innocence, when he did not believe on him, whose innocence he so publicly acknowledged? What was Pilate the better for declaring time after time from his seat of judgment, 'I find no fault in this man; I am innocent of the blood of this just person?' The one and the other died in their sins. What will it advantage us, that in our prayers we daily invoke the name of Christ, as the immaculate Lamb of God, if we do not properly apply the innocence of the blessed Jesus, so as to derive from it a real benefit and a substantial blessing?

Now, in order to reap the true salutary effects of the innocence of Jesus Christ, we must, in the first place, with repentance, and abhorrence of sin, acknowledge both our original and actual guilt. In the next place, it behoves us to consider, how God has imputed all our guilt to the blessed Jesus, our Surety, and laid on him the iniquities of us all, (Isa. liii. 6.): Thus the trespasses of those, who had offended the Divine Majesty, were laid on the victims destined for sacrifices; and though the animals themselves were free from any fault or blemish, they were slain as if they had been guilty of the sins for the expiation of which they were sacrificed. Lastly,

we must with a humble faith fly to the innocence of our Mediator, and with his sacred, his innocent blood, as his very betrayer calls it, sprinkle our hearts from an evil conscience, (Heb. x. 22.) and wash ourselves from the stains of sin. We must pray for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to make us righteous, holy, and irreproachable in all our behaviour, by treading in the footsteps of the immaculate Lamb of God. If we consider the innocence of our blessed Lord in this light, it will be to us an inexhaustible spring of comfort, and the most effectual remedy against despair.

Secondly, Judas may be considered as an unhappy instance of a deluded and wretched sinner. He was a deceived sinner, as he was insensibly drawn into sin by Satan, till he sunk deeper and deeper into that deceitful morass, which swallows up the unwary traveller. The first bait laid for him by the subtle tempter was the thirty silver pieces, by which he enticed him to eternal perdition. He thought he was sure of getting something by his treachery; whereas it proved his utter ruin. He lost his character and reputation; he lost a good conscience; he lost the grace of God, and the affection of his Master; he lost his possessions and life, his body and soul. Those few strangers who happened to die at Jerusalem were the only gainers by his wickedness, to whom it procured a place of interment; and this was more than he himself had, for he lay unburied an accursed, loathsome carcass, an object of infamy and horror. Such a one may very properly be called a deluded sinner.

But he was, at the same time, a most wretched sinner; one who reaped not the least advantage, satisfaction, or delight, from this heinous sin. The thirty pieces of silver, which he received as the reward of his perfidy, his conscience compelled him to refund; so that he got nothing but trouble, anguish, and remorse, and suffered by it the most dreadful

loss. He was tormented by his own conscience ; he was forsaken by those who should have comforted him ; and deserted even by those who had only the outward appearance of honour and honesty. Thus was Judas wretched in his life, wretched in his infamous death, and miserable both in soul and body after death. Hence we may observe,

1. That a sinner does not arrive at once at the highest pitch of wickedness, but walks on to his perdition by insensible gradations.

There is indeed in sin, such an impelling force, such a vehement rapidity, that the sinner is soon carried to excesses, which ripen him for eternal destruction, unless God, who previously shews all patience and long-suffering, even towards the vessels of wrath that are preparing themselves for destruction, is pleased to check this fatal impulse. Hence it is, that no person at once attains to the highest pitch of wickedness, but arrives at it by a gradual progress in sin. The treachery of Judas was not his first crime ; for Satan had prompted him to commit a multitude of smaller sins, before he instigated him to this detestable perfidy. Besides the original sin common to him with all other men, he had a wicked disposition, and a strong propensity to avarice. The next step was a hankering desire after temporal possessions, unjust gains, and illicit profits, which his office gave him an opportunity of indulging ; he being the purse-bearer, who received and paid money on account of his Master and fellow-disciples. These covetous desires were accompanied with delight in lucre ; and this was inflamed by his imagination, which figured to itself the happiness of being possessed of wealth. This insatiable desire of riches was followed by a firm resolution of slipping no opportunity of acquiring wealth. This resolution produced a constant endeavour to make the most of every advantage, in order to increase his store. The next step was to execute the resolution he had formed, by now and then embezzling a piece of money,

by extortion, and receiving bribes; and thus his covetousness brought him to theft. Hence is he termed a thief in the gospel, (John xii. 6.) Satan having cajoled him thus far by means of his covetousness, which is the root of all evil, now proceeded to make farther attempts to bring him to perdition. Now, as Judas did not suffer himself to be awakened from his lethargy, by the frequent admonitions of Christ, (John vi. 64, 70 chap. xiii. 18, 21.) to avoid the snares of Satan; but went on in his covetousness and theft, till by frequent repetition, they became habitual sins. He palliates, excuses, and defends his covetousness, under pretence of care of the poor, (John xii. 5. 6.) Upon this, he fell into a state of obduracy, hardening himself against the affectionate warnings of his Master; so that he grew so abandoned and lost to all sense of shame, as still to associate with the other Apostles. Nay, he ate the Paschal Lamb with Jesus and his disciples; held out those feet, which were walking in the ways of perdition, to be washed and wiped by his Lord and Master, without being in the least moved, or ashamed, at this condescending love of our blessed Saviour. Judas, seeing that he went on prosperously in his pilfering and embezzling, began to contrive how he might enlarge his gains. The chief Priests and Scribes, at that time, being in consultation on the properest means of apprehending and putting Jesus to death; he immediately laid hold on this opportunity of getting a round sum at once, by delivering up his Master. When our blessed Lord revealed to all the other disciples the evil purpose of Judas's heart (which he was for keeping so close) and thus detected his villainy, he was so chagrined at it, that he broke out of the assembly full of rage, malice, and rancour. Upon this, Satan entered into Judas, blinded his mind, and prompted him to put his black purpose in execution; so that he agreed to deliver up his Master to the Jews, for thirty pieces of silver.

And notwithstanding Christ accosted him with these pathetic words ‘Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?’ yet he resolutely perpetrates the villainy he had contracted for. After this, he proceeded still farther, agreeably to these words of St. James, ‘Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,’ (chap. i. 16.) For no sooner had Judas finished this sin, than he fell into despair; and through despair, he plunged himself into eternal perdition. These are the steps, by which Judas gradually descended into the abyss of destruction. O that, from this example of the wretched Judas, we may learn, that in order to avoid great and enormous crimes, we must beware of committing the least sin! O that every one of us may be on his guard against the stratagems of the devil, who thus insensibly leads the soul from one step to another, in the way to eternal perdition! O that they, who are given to covetousness and the love of money, may seriously reflect to what enormities and villainies this vice seduces a man! carrying him such lengths, that for a trifling sum of money he will make shipwreck of his conscience and salvation, and for some temporary profit or gain, run headlong down the precipice of everlasting perdition.

2. It is the artifice of the devil, when he tempts a sinner, to make him believe that sin is only a trifle, and that the mercy of God is inexhaustible; but when he has once gained his end, and the sin is committed, he represents it to the sinner’s conscience in different colours.

This the unhappy Judas experienced to his infinite grief, and irreparable loss. To betray Christ, at first seemed to him but a very slight fault; so that he is quickly resolved on it. He thought his Master, out of his abundant good nature, and uncommon mildness and lenity to great sinners, would soon forgive him; and that as Jesus had escaped through the midst of his enemies more than once, he would easily extricate himself from the danger he was going to

involve him in. As to the former supposition, he was confirmed in it, as Jesus had publicly declared, 'he that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out' or reject. But satan, having now gained his point, and seduced Judas into sin; he assumes another tone, and represents the affair in a very different light. The sin, which before seemed to Judas a trifle light as air, now oppressed his conscience as an insupportable load; so that he was crushed under the oppressive weight of it. On the other hand, the mercy and lenity of Christ, which he before thought to be without bounds, vanished from his mind; so that he no longer entertained any hopes of pardon and forgiveness. Thus it is with the careless and secure. They first look on sin as a grain of sand or a mote in the sun, and make no account of it; but afterwards it swells to a gigantic size, even beyond the stretch of their imagination. Satan first alludes them with a vain hope of God's mercy, and thereby brings them presumptuously to sin, from an assurance of pardon and forgiveness; but after the sin is committed, he fills them with fears and terrors, by representing to their consciences the divine justice, and those dreadful threatenings which God has thundered against sinners. Happy is the man, who, before he commits sin, thinks on the justice and purity of the Deity, in order to deter him from sinning; but after he has sinned, reflects on the infinite mercy of God, and by that consideration is preserved from falling into the abyss of despair.

3. Satan extenuates great and flagrant crimes, by inspiring the sinner with a false and delusive hope.

Judas was puffed up with the vain hope, that Christ would not fail at once to break asunder all the cords, with which his enemies would bind him, and by that means escape out of their hands. It is probable that his conscience, at first, made some struggle against the temptation to commit such a horrible crime; but he was at last over-persuaded by this

false hope, which at length turned the scale in favour of covetousness, against the dictates of his conscience. This is the case with many thousands of unhappy sinners. Some are led into sin by the impious hope, that their crimes will never come to light, and consequently that they shall escape the punishment which the law inflicts on such crimes. Others are drawn on by a presumptuous hope of obtaining pardon and forgiveness from the divine mercy, which is infinite and inexhaustible. Others again are allured into wickedness by the hopes, that they shall prevent any ill consequences that may follow on their sins ; and others by the hopes, that they shall one day repent, and intreat forgiveness of God ; that they will be able to repair the faults they shall have committed, by other good works, and by that means to balance their account with heaven. By these delusive and groundless suppositions, a sinner is induced to commit the most heinous crimes, and greatest villainies. But when matters turn out afterwards quite contrary to his vain expectations, and he finds himself deceived in his hope, then he acknowledges with grief and confusion, that he never could have thought that this would have been the consequence of his sins ; and if he could in the least have imagined it, he would never have ventured to commit them. But let us maturely consider, that when a sin is once committed, it is no longer in our power to prevent the consequences of it. When a stone is once thrown by the hand or sling, we can no longer direct its course by a wish : As little is sin, when once committed, subject to our wishes and directions. Let us therefore turn a deaf ear to the solicitations and blandishments of false hope ; for the end of such a delusive hope is despair.

4. The restitution of ill acquired goods is, indeed necessary, but when such a restitution does not proceed from a true faith and sincere repentance, it will not hush the importunate clamours of conscience.

Judas brought his thirty pieces of silver again ; for to him they were then so many coals of fire, which he could no longer carry in his bosom. But, as this restitution was done with rage and passion, and did not proceed from a real hatred of sin ; but from self-love, for he imagined, that by this means he should quiet his troubled conscience ; it availed him nothing. It is a certain and invariable maxim, That the sins of theft and fraud will never be forgiven, without either restoring what has been ill-gotten to the parties defrauded ; or, if that cannot be done, by disposing of it for the use of the poor, and thus restoring it to God, the Sovereign and universal Proprietor of all things. For while wealth acquired by indirect and dishonest means is retained, there can be no real hatred of the sins of fraud, theft and dishonesty. But if such restitution be not made out of a filial affection and sincere love towards God, we cannot promise ourselves any advantage from it. However, restitution is by no means to be accounted a full satisfaction for the theft committed ; but only as a part of that method which God has proposed to obtain forgiveness of sins, and as a proof of the reality and sincerity of our repentance for any frauds or injustice, of which we have been guilty.

5. A sinner may proceed a great way in the duty of repentance, from the mere natural impulse of his conscience, when it is awakened by preceding grace ; and yet come short of the desired haven of salvation.

The traitor's conscience being disturbed, he did many things which are not practised by mere nominal Christians, as I have observed in the preceding consideration. But what did all this avail him, since he did not persevere in his repentance, until he had got safe in the harbour of Salvation ? He practised several duties, which made a show of a sincere repentance ; but yet his heart remained obdurate and unconverted. He was more intent on assuaging the pangs of his conscience, than solicitous to be absol-

ved of his guilt. O ye sinners, whose consciences have been awakened from a state of security, behold yourselves in this mirror ! Give yourselves no rest, until you are truly humbled before God ; until you are passed from the law to the gospel. Hasten to Christ, that fountain which is freely opened for sin and uncleanness ; and seek not so much to appease your conscience, as to free yourselves of that guilt, which oppresses and disturbs it.

6. All those, who are destined to be ministers and teachers in the church of Christ, should have the example of Judas before their eyes, as a continual warning and admonition. They may particularly learn these important truths from it.

1. A person may have a lawful call to the ministry, and yet be found a wicked and unprofitable servant. Judas did not get among the number of the apostles by any indirect means, such as are practised by too many in our days. He was regularly called to that high office ; and yet he proved a scandal to the holy function. Therefore, when a minister has nothing to plead, but the legality of his calling, he is not a whit better than the traitor Judas. For what does it avail a man to boast of a legal calling, without endeavouring to fulfil the duties of his function ?

2. A person may be possessed of extraordinary gifts, and great natural endowments, and yet be a child of perdition. Judas unquestionably was not without his peculiar talents. The blessed Jesus, who had chosen him for the work of an apostle, undoubtedly imparted to him the qualities necessary for the discharge of that high office. However, he went, as the scripture informs us, ‘ to his place.’ Therefore, let no one trust to his gifts and natural endowments, but endeavour that his heart may be sanctified by grace ; otherwise, while he preaches the gospel to others, he himself may be a castaway.

3. God usually discharges every unfaithful steward of his mysteries, and sends him out of his house. He bears with them for a time, as Judas was permitted to remain about three years in the apostolic college. But, at a proper season, God will deliver his church from such unfaithful pastors.

4. To record the signal instances of divine judgments is an important article of ecclesiastical history. St. Luke was not ignorant, that the tragical exit of Judas had been before related by St. Matthew; yet he, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, has likewise inserted it in the history of the primitive church, (Acts i.) It was particularly necessary, that such an instance of a wicked minister should be recorded in the New Testament, that the way to the ministerial office might be barred against deceitful pastors, and a holy fear impressed on them. It was therefore fit that this dreadful example should be known to all that dwelt at Jerusalem, (Acts i. 19.)

Thirdly, Judas may be considered as an example of despair and its fatal effects. Satan having enticed Judas to sin, continued pouring oil on the fire which burnt in his bosom, augmenting the torture of his conscience, and, on the other hand, diminishing the divine mercy; until at length, the traitor seeks a solitary place, and there puts an end to his wretched life, by hanging himself. Hence we may learn the following truths:

1. That solitude may be a very great snare to a sinner, when the conscience is troubled and oppressed.

Our blessed Lord himself, in his extreme agony on the Mount of Olives, was not quite alone; but took with him three of his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane, though when he went to pray, he withdrew from them about the distance of a stone's cast. Therefore, it much more behoves disquieted Christians, when under severe temptations from the gloomy spirit of melancholy, to abstain from solitude and retire-

ment, that they may not be overcome by the subtle tempter. But here, indeed, two extremes are to be avoided. On the one side, solitude must at such times be shunned; on the other side, we are no less to avoid ludicrous companions. Many unexperienced persons run to the latter, that they may drink or jest away their melancholy, which is so troublesome to them. Though grief and melancholy may, for a time, be diverted by such expedients; yet they will break out again with redoubled violence, like a stream, which, after its current has been stopped for a while, forces its way through all obstacles with the greater rapidity and force. The middle way, between these two equally dangerous extremes, is to have recourse to godly conversation, or to join in prayer with some other devout persons; and to spend the rest of our time in an extraordinary application to business, or diligent working in our respective callings. By this means, many of the temptations of the evil spirit of melancholy will be avoided or vanquished.

2. The horrid inclination to suicide, which some gloomy minds are possessed with, must be overcome by prayer, and the word of God.

Had the unhappy Judas armed himself with these spiritual weapons, and manfully handled them, he had not been carried to such a deplorable excess. But let his irreparable loss make us wise and cautious. This species of temptation is not so uncommon as we are apt to think, and those persons who are naturally of a melancholy disposition are too liable to it. When such men happen to fall into extreme poverty, or meet with any severe misfortunes and uncommon calamities; when they labour under lingering pains, or are much troubled in their consciences, then satan infuses such horrid thoughts as these into their depressed minds: "There is no hope left for me, and my case is irremediable. It is only plunging into the water, or properly using a pistol, a sword, or other instrument of death, and there is an end of all my

pain of body, and terrors of mind at once; &c.” But when we are assaulted by such temptations, let us beware of giving way to an immoderate fear, and dejection of mind, but be of good courage, and combat against them with the word of God and prayer; and let us impress on our minds a proper idea of the heinousness and guilt of the sin of self-murder *,

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 * The guilt of this sin will appear more evident from the following incontestible positions laid down by Dr. Marperger, in his ‘Admonition against the damnable sin of self-murder,’ published at Nurenberg in the year 1715.

1. That a man, who lays violent hands on himself, acts contrary to the first law of nature; and consequently is worse than a heathen, nay, than any of the brute creation.

2. He offends, in the most heinous manner, against the written law of God in the sixth commandment.

3. He sins against God in the most essential articles of the christian faith. He not only defies the tribunal of divine justice, but likewise the throne of divine grace and mercy; nay, he renounces his baptismal vow, and disclaims all allegiance to the true God.

4. He impiously encroaches on the essential prerogatives of the most High God; and consequently is guilty of the most flagrant treason against the divine majesty, the punishment of which crime is beyond our power to describe.

5. He totally divests himself of the image of God and Christ, and puts on the resemblance of the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning; but appears, in this respect, more horribly criminal than satan, because he murders himself.

6. He turns his back on the whole system of christianity, and from a disciple of Christ becomes a revolted traitor, like Judas Iscariot.

7. He does himself an irreparable injury, and the most horrid mischief that can be conceived; for, by putting an end to his life, he cuts off his time of repentance and grace, after which there is no salvation.

8. With his wretched life he destroys his character, and leaves a deplorable legacy of affliction and trouble to his unhappy family.

9. He has not the least warrantable plea to urge for his horrid crime. He does not find that exemption from pain and remorse, which he seeks; but, on the contrary, plunges himself into the deep abyss of grief, horror, and despair; and consequently is most wretchedly blinded, and deceived by satan and his own unaccountable frenzy.

that we may always think of it with the abhorrence and horror it deserves. Now, to suppose, that by the sacrifice of our own lives we can appease the wrath of God, and render him propitious to us by suicide, is the very height of absurdity and frenzy. Can fire be quenched by fire? can smaller sins be expiated by a greater? Can any thing be more preposterous and wicked, more impious and absurd, than such a supposition? When satan therefore suggests such impious and desponding thoughts to us, let us oppose his temptation by representations of a quite different kind,* and foil the tempter by making use of our reason and the word of God.

3. Despair is a dangerous rock, on which those who have sailed on the ocean of life with prosperous gales, and live in the greatest security, are often shipwrecked.

The greater the carnal security of an impenitent sinner has been, and the less sense he has had of his danger, the greater and more insupportable his despair is, when his conscience comes to be awakened, and he finds himself surrounded with perils. Judas was presumptuous, secure, and inconsiderate, until his execrable crime was completed; and slighted all the kind admonitions of the Lord Jesus to the last. But after the commission of the sin, when the affair turned out contrary to his expectation, he was seized with melancholy, dread, and horror equal to his former vain security, and unthinking levity. This is still the case with those, who sin in expectation of grace and forgiveness. Before the sin is committed, satan encourages them to hope: but after the full commission of it, he tells them, to despair of pardon and forgiveness from the mercy of God. Therefore, if we would avoid falling into despair, we must not suffer ourselves to be lulled into too great a security.

* See Dr. Watt's 'Preservative against self-murder,' printed at London, 1726. Adams, &c. on the same subject.

Indeed it does not always happen, that actual despair follows a state of too much security. Many thousands die tranquil and easy, in their presumptuous reliance on God's mercy; but their horror and despair will be the greater and more intolerable, when their consciences come first to be awakened in a miserable eternity. For one who has split on the rocks of despair, a thousand go to the bottom in their security and negligence; and to their last gasp cling to a delusive hope of the divine mercy, without endeavouring to render themselves the proper objects of it by repentance and godly sorrow. But as security may be the way that leadeth to despair, it behoves us to be no less on our guard to avoid one snare of satan, than the other.

4. Covetousness, and an inordinate love for the things of this world, are often the causes and fore-runners of melancholy and despair.

For, according to St. Paul, 'the love of money is the root of all evil, and not only draws men into temptations and snares, but likewise drowns them in destruction and perdition,' (1 Tim. vi. 9.) and the sad example of Judas teaches us, that it leads to despair, and then plunges the unhappy sinner into eternal ruin by self-murder. When a man withdraws his heart from God, and fixes his affections entirely on temporal things, if he is afterwards deprived of them by robbery, fire, the ravages of war, or any other accident; or, if his conscience happen to rouse him, and lay open to his affrighted mind the groupe of sins, by which he has amassed together that unrighteous mammon; his soul is torn with anguish and remorse, and becomes like the troubled sea. At such a crisis, if the power of satan avails itself of the perturbations of his unbelieving heart, he plunges himself into the abyss of despair. Let us therefore remove far from us every cause and occasion of despair; and, if we would not make shipwreck of faith and a good con-

science, let us avoid covetousness and an overfondness for the things of this world.

II. Let us, in the next place, take into our consideration the chief Priests and Scribes, who had bribed Judas to commit this treachery.

In the whole transaction with Judas, and with regard to the price of blood, which the traitor restored to them, the chief Priests and Scribes plainly shewed themselves,

1. Unfaithful and wicked shepherds, and guilty of those vices with which the prophet Ezekiel charges the shepherds of Israel, (Ezek. xxxiv. 4.) They were void of all pastoral care and affection towards the lost sheep, that came to them acknowledging his sin. They had not the least compassion, the least sympathetic feeling for him; were not moved with the least inclination to relieve him. They rather insulted him in a haughty manner, saying, 'What is that to us? see thou to that.' They had been the vile seducers, who had bribed the traitor to commit this infamous crime, and now they leave the seduced wretch to shift for himself; and it was a matter of indifference to them, that satan by their means destroyed a soul. They shewed themselves,

2. Vile hypocrites. They made a scruple of putting the price of blood into the holy treasury in the temple; yet they had not scrupled to bribe a wretch to betray innocent blood, with the same money.— They provide a place of interment for the bodies of strangers, dying at Jerusalem; but the souls of the living they think beneath their care. They are for getting themselves a name by a charitable foundation, and raising a monument to their own vain glory, in order to cover the bloody stains with which their detested names were sprinkled by their condemnation of our blessed Lord. But they failed in this their hypocritical aim; for God plucked away the mask from their wickedness and injustice.

3. Lastly, They shew that the scriptures were fulfilled in them, though they were not conscious of it; for, contrary to their intention, they gave occasion to the accomplishment of the prophecy written by Zechariah, as mentioned above. Agreeably to this St. Paul observes, 'that they who dwelt at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, fulfilled them in condemning him,' (Acts xiii. 27.) From these three characters of the rulers and scribes, we shall draw the following inferences for our admonition and improvement :

1. A sinner, after the commission of any grievous crime, cannot promise himself the least counsel, assistance, relief, or compassion, from those who, for their own private views, have seduced him to commit it.

Notwithstanding the fair words and promises the chief Priests had given Judas, when they wanted his assistance in the execution of their wicked devices; after he had served their impious purpose, they treated him with contempt, haughtiness, and inhumanity. 'This is generally the way of seducers; when they have drawn any one into the snare, they never offer to help him out of it: And if the affair happens to miscarry, they know how to extricate themselves out of the danger. If the person whom they have seduced makes any complaint to them about remorse of conscience, they only ridicule him as a weak man, addicted to melancholy and lowness of spirits. Miserable comforters! detestable perfidiousness of the world! Surely this consideration ought to deter every one from following its wicked courses.

2. Divine providence eminently displays itself in bringing to light the infamy of the wicked, and the evil devices of hypocrites, though they labour ever so much to conceal them.

The chief Priests were for palliating their wickedness and injustice by a pretended charitable founda-

tion, and employed the price of innocent blood in purchasing a field for the interment of strangers; that they might be said to be good men, who shewed such a fatherly concern for indigent strangers, by providing a convenient place near Jerusalem to bury them in. But the wise and just providence of God so ordered it, that this, their pretended pious foundation, was branded by the people with an infamous name, which transmitted to posterity the remembrance of the wickedness of its founders.

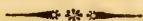
Every one, who does not willfully shut his eyes against conviction, must have observed similar proceedings of divine providence in the histories of states and kingdoms, as well as in daily occurrences. The searcher of hearts generally exposes hypocritical and wicked men; and often fixes a mark of infamy on those actions, by which they aim at the reputation of extraordinary sanctity. Oh, that this may deter every one from hypocrisy, and secret villainy! and that all hypocrites may see their own deformity in the characters of Gehazi, Judas, the chief Priests, and Jewish rulers!

3. Wicked men and hypocrites, unknowingly, and against their intention, are often made use of as instruments to fulfil the prophecies recorded in scripture.

How many are there who by their own example verify St. Paul's words: 'Evil men and seducers, shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived,' (2 Tim. iii. 13.) How many who call themselves Christians, insult and persecute the servants of God, and thus unknowingly fulfil the saying of the same apostle: 'All, who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution,' (2 Tim. iii. 12.) But alas! how miserable will be their lot, who thus, contrary to their knowledge or intention, confirm the truth of the holy scriptures! God forbid, that we should be found amongst such an evil and perverse generation!

THE PRAYER.

PRAISED be thy name, O faithful and gracious God, who, in thy holy word, has caused to be set before us such examples, by which we may learn to avoid those fatal rocks on which they made shipwreck of their faith and salvation. Preserve us, O Lord, from grievous and presumptuous sins; and when, through the temptations of satan, and the solicitations of our own flesh, we are so unhappy as to fall, keep us from filling up the measure of our transgressions by heaping sin upon sin, and from adding to our accumulated guilt a sinful despair of thy mercy; that mercy which thou hast promised unto sinners in Jesus Christ, and has sworn by thyself to make them partakers of. May we rather make thy mercy our refuge; and, when we are sinking, lay hold of this plank, that we may reach the haven of salvation. Grant this through the merits of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.



CONSIDERATION IV.

THE FIRST CONFERENCE BETWEEN PILATE AND
THE ACCUSERS OF THE LORD JESUS.

‘And the chief Priests themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring you against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die,’ (John xviii. 28—32.)

We have hitherto considered how the Jewish Sanhedrim, after pronouncing sentence on the blessed Jesus, sent him away bound from Caiaphas's palace; and by break of day, brought him to the judgment-hall of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. We have farther observed, how divine providence, just when they were going to lead him away to the civil tribunal, gave a remarkable check to the progress of the chief Priests and Elders in their unparalleled injustice; for the very traitor, whom they had bribed to betray his master, with his own mouth protested to them, that Jesus was innocent of the crimes he was charged with, saying, in the presence of them all, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent.' We have likewise seen the little account they made of this confession of Judas, being still unmoved, and resolved to perpetrate their wicked purpose. We shall now proceed to consider what happened to our blessed Saviour in Pilate's judgment-hall.

The Holy Spirit seems to have taken particular care, that this part of the history of our Saviour's passion should be the more accurately and circumstantially related by the four Evangelists, because he foresaw what false and spurious accounts of this transaction would be afterwards dispersed, both among the Jews and Gentiles. The Emperor Maximinus, from an inveterate malice and rancour against the sacred person of Christ, and the Christian religion, ordered a book to be expressly written under the title of the Acts of Pilate. This spurious account was stuffed with the most impious blasphemies against our blessed Lord; and the Emperor caused a great number of copies of this book to be transcribed, and dispersed all over the Roman Empire. He even ordered it to be introduced into the schools of the Christians, that their children, by learning it by heart, might in their tender years be prejudiced against the doctrines of Christ. In order

to obviate these scandalous falsities, and to frustrate this foreseen contrivance of satan, the Spirit of God directed the sacred penmen, for the prevention of so great an evil, thus circumstantially to set down every thing that past between Jesus and Pontius Pilate; and more particularly, and with the utmost punctuality, to make mention of Pilate's often repeated testimony of our Saviour's innocence.

As to the particular part of which is now under consideration, it contains an account of Pilate's first conference with the accusers of the Lord Jesus; in which we may observe,

First, what immediately preceded this conference. Secondly, The conference itself.

I. We shall, in the first place, consider what immediately preceded this conference both on the side of the Jews, and on that of Pilate.

Concerning the Jews it is said, (John xviii. 28.) 'They themselves went not into the judgment-hall.' The Jews, i. e. the chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders, having brought Jesus to the door of Pilate's house, where he also used to hold his court of judicature; they staid without, and sent in to request the favour of Pilate, that he would be pleased to step out of the judgment-hall, and hear their charge, and the sentence they had passed on Jesus.

St. John the Evangelist mentions the two following reasons for this behaviour of the Jews.

The first is, that they might not be defiled. The Jews by their ceremonial law were liable to numberless defilements. They were defiled by going into an unclean house; it was a defilement to touch a dead body; and they were polluted by many other circumstances, which Moses particularly enumerates in Leviticus, (chap. xi.—xv.) However, it does not in the least appear from the Mosaic law, that they would have defiled themselves by going into the house of an heathen. This was no more than a traditional right, enjoined by the Scribes and Pharisees;

but in the observance of it, many were more punctual than in their obedience to the express commands of God himself.

Thus when Peter went into the house of Cornelius, a Pagan officer, those christians who still adhered to the Jewish traditions and customs, reproached him with it, as a very great offence, saying, 'thou wentest in to men uncircumcised,' (Acts xi. 3.) But this institution of the Scribes and Elders, though varnished over with a pretended detestation of idolatry, was chiefly the effect of the extreme pride and haughtiness of the Jews, who looked on the Gentiles as unclean dogs, and asserted, that it would cast a blemish on the dignity of a Jew to enter into the house of a heathen. Hence it appears, that it was from this Jewish pride and haughtiness, that the chief Priests and Elders made a difficulty of entering into Pilate's house, lest they should be defiled; for according to the law, (Num. ix. 6. &c.) pollutions were more carefully to be avoided at the feast of the passover.

Secondly. Besides this general motive for not entering the judgment-hall, they now had this particular motive, namely, that they were to eat the passover. They had eaten the Paschal Lamb the evening before, at the very time when Jesus was celebrating that institution with his disciples; so that by the passover here is understood, not the eating of the Paschal Lamb, but the Paschal sacrifices, which were to be offered during the seven days of that festival. It was now the first day of the feast; on which the Jews used to kill a great number of sheep and oxen; and, after laying some parts of the victims on the altar as a burnt-offering, they did eat the remainder in the courts of the temple, with great rejoicing, (Numb. xxviii. 16, 18, 19.) But it was not lawful for those who had contracted any defilement, specified either in the divine law or their own institutes, to assist at these sacrifices; for, according to the express order of God, no unclean per-

son was to eat of the Paschal Lamb, nor of the flesh of the Paschal-offering, (Levit. xxii. 4, 5, 6.) These hypocrites, pretending that their tender consciences would not admit of their entering Pilate's house, sent in a request, that he would do them the favour to come out, and confer with them at the door, which was all that the Jewish law allowed of at such a time.

As for what passed on Pilate's side, the Evangelist says, 'Then Pilate went out unto them.' Besides the marble portico before the door, there appears to have been a paved court before the palace, which was the place where Pilate conferred with the high Priests, Scribes, and Elders. Had this heathen governor been inclined to assume a proper dignity, and strictly adhere to the ceremonial in such cases, he might have dismissed them with a reproof; and this he might the rather have done, as the high Priest could not have produced any divine law, which prohibited them from going into the house of a heathen judge. For this was no more than a custom introduced by their pride, and an inveterate contempt of the Gentiles. But here he acted like a prudent and cautious politician; conforming to this usage of the Jews, that he might not provoke them by insisting on an unnecessary punctilio, which might render them his enemies: For he well knew, that this superstitious people would rather suffer ten thousand deaths, than deviate the least tittle from their ceremonies and traditions. But undoubtedly his heart was inclined to act in this manner, by the secret working of divine providence, that the trial of our blessed Lord might be made more public, and his innocence manifested to the whole world.

Let us now view these circumstances with a spiritual eye, and consider what mystery of iniquity lurked under them; in which we shall be assisted by the following observations.

1. It is the usual practice of impious hypocrites to pay a greater regard to the traditions and ordinances of men, than to the revealed law of God.

Of this, the enemies and accusers of our blessed Saviour here furnish us with a signal instance. The commandments of God are: Thou shalt not kill: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, (Exod. xx. 13, 16.) 'The innocent and righteous slay thou not,' (Exod. xxiii. 7.) But these divine commands they slight and presumptuously transgress; whereas they pretend conscientiously to observe the injunctions of their forefathers, which made it improper to go into the house of a heathen, as it polluted and rendered them unfit for the celebration of the passover. God, by enjoining that no unclean person should eat of the Paschal Lamb or the Paschal-offering, intended to denote, that no person can have fellowship with Christ, who does not deny all fellowship with the dead, unclean, and unfruitful works of darkness. These hypocrites throw away the substance of the divine law, and grasp at the shadow. They abhorred the pollution of the Gentiles; and yet make use of their assistance, in order to oppress the innocent. Their care to keep themselves from outward defilement extended even beyond the bounds that God required: But purity of heart and conscience was quite out of their thoughts; for they are counteracting them by unjust and blood-thirsty designs. Thus our blessed Lord very justly upbraided them with 'laying aside the commandments of God, and holding the traditions of men,' (Mark vii. 8.)

This is still the usual practice of hypocrites, and particularly prevails most in the church of Rome, in which christianity is, as it were, overwhelmed by a deluge of human ordinances. For instance, God has forbidden drunkenness, and caused it to be inserted in that black list of the works of the flesh, which exclude men from the kingdom of God;

(Gal. v. 21.) On the other hand, there is not a syllable in the whole scriptures that prohibits christians from eating flesh in Lent. Notwithstanding all this, the Romish church accounts it a great abomination to eat flesh in Lent, without purchasing a dispensation; though in that holy season, it is permitted to indulge one's self in any other kinds of dainties, and the most delicate fish of all sorts, which, however, are a species of flesh, (1 Cor. xv. 39.) and with the richest wines, &c. even to intemperance. Nay, in many Popish countries, fornication, adultery, perjury, fraud, violence, and murder, are accounted less criminal than eating flesh, fowl, milk, &c. in Lent. As God himself has instituted, sanctified, and blessed the state of matrimony; so has the same divine authority, in the strictest manner, forbidden fornication. Notwithstanding this, Popery, from political motives, interdicts marriage to both their regular and secular clergy; whereas the keeping of concubines is often connived at, and consequently fornication is accounted a much less sin, than to live in the married state. Hence it is evident, that the decrees of the Pope are more implicitly obeyed than the commands of God. I need not here mention the toleration and privileges granted at Rome, the residence of his holiness, to prostitutes and public brothels. Do not these distinguished marks exhibit a strong resemblance between Popish and Jewish hypocrisy?

2. To make a scruple of transgressing vain traditions and trifling observances, and to commit the greatest crimes without any difficulty, is in the eyes of God a most abominable hypocrisy.

Of this we have here a flagrant instance in the accusers of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Their consciences would not allow them to go into the house or judgment-hall of a heathen Governor: but they made not the least scruple of committing the greatest injustice, by condemning an innocent person; of rejecting the Messiah; of passing sentence of

death on the Prince of life, and the only Son of God, as a blasphemer; and lastly, of delivering him up to the heathens in order to be executed, according to the iniquitous sentence they had passed on him. They would by no means defile themselves, that they might celebrate the passover; but did not reflect, that to the wicked and unbelieving nothing is pure, but every thing is defiled, even their mind and conscience, (Tit. i. 15.) Their feet, which were swift to shed blood, were by no means to go over the threshold of the Governor's house, and yet their blood-thirsty desires, like ravening wolves, had long before entered the judgment-hall. This was a vile and most scandalous hypocrisy, by which the blessed Jesus, whom they had already sentenced, was as it were again most strongly accused, and his pretended guilt increased. For, the greater show of sanctity his enemies put on, the more the people became persuaded that such very pious and conscientious persons would never have condemned our blessed Lord, if they had not found him guilty of the most enormous crimes. Under such disguises and masks of pretended sanctity, was the innocent Jesus condemned to suffer death; and to this present day, it is often the case of his innocent members.

By this part of his sufferings, has our blessed Saviour expiated this kind of hypocrisy, if we repent of it in time. Too many in our days make a conscience of committing small faults, and often refrain from things lawful, or even proper to be done; and yet do not stick at the commission of any real sins. For instance; some would think themselves defiled, were they, out of regard to any infirm state of health, to eat a bit of bread in the morning before they partake of the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; but at the same time approach the Lord's table with impenitent hearts, and minds tainted with malice and envy, and after the celebration of the Eucharist, return to their former sins, their avarice, injustice,

pride, drunkenness, &c. without any scruple. Some scruple to kneel at the Lord's table by another, whom they look upon as a great sinner, and unworthy partaker of the blessed sacrament, that they may not be offended by him ; but forget that they are guilty of judging another, and of a breach of charity, which is so strongly recommended by this sacred institution of our Lord and Saviour, whose particular injunctions it was, to judge no man, and to love one another as he hath loved us. Many pretend a scruple of conscience against distributing to the poor according to their large abilities : For, say they, We do not know what use the poor may make of our liberality ; they may lavish it away in a riotous manner, and by that means make us partakers of all the sins committed with the money we bestow upon them, or at least make us encouragers of idleness and sloth. But their sordid avarice, their hard heartedness, and want of charity towards the poor and necessitous, which are the real motives of their refusing to relieve the distressed, they account no sins ; these sit very easy on their consciences. Many likewise scruple to bear the least detriment to their honour : They think themselves authorised by laws, both human and divine, to vindicate their character, and revenge every affront offered them ; whereas they pay little regard to the honour of their great Creator, but insult his divine majesty by deliberate sins, which they make no scruple of committing. Thus, this kind of hypocrisy, which was so glaringly conspicuous in the enemies of Christ, still prevails too much among those who call themselves Christians. Oh, that every one who finds his resemblance in the instances we have given, may be brought to acknowledge the deceitfulness of his wicked heart ! and when he is convinced of his insincerity, may he seek for the remission of such abominable hypocrisy by a sincere repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ.

3. When Christ and his members are to be oppressed, satan easily persuades unconverted worldlings to forego all the respect due to their rank and character, which, at other times, they so strenuously insist upon.

In the instance before us, Pilate, the Roman Governor, deigns to comply with the desire of the Jews; he condescends to come out of his place, to confer with them, and hear their complaints, in the paved court before his door. This proceeding very well comports with the maxims of policy and worldly wisdom. But the mystery of iniquity had also a share in it; namely, That when Christ and his members are to be persecuted, satan can bring the most haughty to submit to the necessary complaisance and condescensions to effect their wicked purposes. At other times, such worldly politicians will not hear of any action unbecoming their rank and dignity, or any condescension derogatory to their honour; yet when Christ and his members are to be injured, they forget their high rank and dignity, and join with the meanest of the people in punishing the innocent. Then all disputes about precedency are set aside; every thing is transacted without ceremony, and the lay-persecutors of the followers of Christ, cheerfully accommodate themselves to the desire of his Ecclesiastic-enemies. Such an unaccountable harmony can the hatred of Christ bring about among wicked men: whereas those conferences that are held for the promotion of the public welfare, or for establishing peace among princes, often miscarry for want of an agreement in the ceremonial; none of the parties being willing to shew the first example of condescension, for accomplishing so desirable an end. This is a mystery of iniquity, to be observed in Pilate's behaviour on this occasion. Should not the love of Christ, therefore move us to a voluntary denial of our own

will and pretended honour, since an inveterate hatred of Christ had that surprising effect on his enemies?

II. We come, in the next place, to consider the conference which was held between the Jews and Pontius Pilate ; which contained the following particulars.

First, Pilate's question, ' Pilate said, What accusation bring ye against this man ? ' The members of the Sanhedrim, or great council, being themselves come in person to deliver up the prisoner, whom they had taken and bound, to Pilate ; he could not but look on them as the plaintiffs or accusers ; and therefore was for knowing the ground of their charge against him, accounting it absurd to condemn a man to die, who had not yet been convicted of a capital crime. This had the appearance of a good beginning ; and afforded some hopes, that Pilate would have proceeded equitably and conscientiously in this trial. But it is well known from history, that he had unjustly condemned to death many persons without any hearing ; so that this question did not proceed from any moral regard to justice and impartiality, but a mere outward compliance with the Roman law. For, as Festus, another Roman Governor, observed, It was not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he who is accused, have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him, (Acts xxv. 16.) However, it were to be wished, that all succeeding judges had imitated the example of Pilate in this particular ; and, instead of precipitately passing sentence on good men, as heretics, on the informations of malicious and idolatrous Priests, first required evident proofs of their guilt, and examined the cause to the very bottom. Such an impartial proceeding would have saved the blood of many martyrs and confessors of the truth.

In this proceeding of Pilate, we are likewise to look to the counsel of Almighty God, which directed

this unjust judge to demand a proof of their accusation, that the innocence of the blessed Jesus, which had been obscured and overpowered in the spiritual court of the Jews, might at the tribunal of Pilate be fully displayed; and that by its effulgence and genuine lustre, it might dissipate all the dark clouds of calumny. The innocence of our Mediator and Redeemer was to be thus manifested, that every one might be convinced that it was not for his own sins, but for the sins of others he suffered. This was the question put by Pilate; to which,

Secondly, The Jews made this rude answer: 'If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee,' (John xviii. 30.) These great personages were offended, that the Roman governor should presume to ask them, on what account they were for having Jesus of Nazareth crucified, since this looked as if he had suspected their impartiality and justice. As if they had said, Do you not know that the Roman emperors have left us an absolute privilege of taking cognizance of crimes committed against our law, and of passing sentence on the criminals? We are not obliged to give you, who are a heathen, the reasons of our judicial proceedings. It is our business to try causes, and your part to put our sentence in execution, without any farther questioning the legality of the sentence we have pronounced. This is an infringement of our privileges and liberty, which we can by no means admit of. Thus they opposed their authority and privilege to the power of the civil judge, in hopes that Pilate being intimidated by their resolute behaviour, would, without any further enquiry, and in deference to their judgment, give orders for the immediate execution of the prisoner. They thought it sufficient that they had found Jesus guilty, and that Pilate ought to acquiesce in their sentence.

How rude and uncivil was this answer? It was not long since Jesus had been accused of rudeness in

the Jewish court of judicature, and a blow had been given him by one of the officers of the court, with this reprimand, 'Answerest thou the high Priest so?' (John xviii. 22.) If we consider this behaviour of the chief Priests and Elders towards their acknowledged superior, it is easily seen that they were much more wanting in respect to rulers, than our blessed Lord, whom they unjustly taxed with that fault.

Thirdly, We may observe Pilate's answer to the Jews, 'Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.' Pilate saw through their crafty designs, and that they were for putting him on proceeding in this affair contrary to the law of the Romans, and all justice and equity. He was offended that they were for making him, as it were, their tool, and blindly to complete, without so much as knowing on what account, the unjust proceedings they had carried on against Jesus; and therefore he retorts their incivility in these words, 'Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.' As if he had said, If you have a law, by which a man may be sentenced to die, and executed, without a trial, judge your malefactor according to your own law. We, Romans, have other laws, which are more agreeable to equity and justice. If you do not think me worthy of being informed of the reason of your passing sentence of death on this man, since, possibly, you are conscious it will not bear examination, I look upon myself above being your tool, to put in execution any of your illegal sentences. As for what concerns yourselves, execute what you have decided, at your own peril; I declare against having any concern in the matter on such a footing. Thus as the chief Priest and Elders had taken it so very ill, that Christ should, in their opinion, be wanting in his respect to the Sanhedrim, (John xviii. 22.) so Pilate is no less offended, that they should shew so little respect to him, and the Roman laws.

Fourthly, The evasive excuse of the Jews, who made answer, 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.' They pretend that they dare not put any one to death; and yet they had shed the blood of all the prophets, (Luke xi. 50, 51.) But they falsely concluded, that if their hands were not the immediate instrument of it, all was well, and that they were not guilty of a breach of the sixth commandment. They did not consider that they put Jesus to death with their envenomed tongues; that they had bribed a traitor to betray the innocent blood; that they had suborned false witnesses against him; and lastly, that by repeated clamours, and tumultuous outcries they were resolved to prevail on Pilate to ratify and execute their sentence. Infamous hypocrites! who, in our days, are not without many brethren in iniquity. How often do the wicked, even when the oppression of the good has been resolved upon, make a mighty shew of a conscientious impartiality, as if they had no manner of hand in these unhappy affairs, and were much concerned on the account? But none are more expert in these hypocritical practices than the infamous engines of anti-christ. St John, in the Revelation, represents the false church as drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus; (Rev. xvii. 6.) yet is it a maxim among the Popish clergy, that the church sheds no blood; whereas it instigates the civil power to employ the sword against supposed heretics, who oppose its idolatrous worship.

Moreover, there is a dispute concerning the import of these words of the Jewish Priests and Elders; namely, whether the Jews were at that time, totally deprived of the privilege of trying capital cases? or whether they still retained it with certain limitations? This controversy we shall, at present, wave. However, since there are examples of the Jews having delivered up innocent persons to death after our Saviour's crucifixion, as St. Stephen, (Acts vii.) and

St. James, who were beheaded by order of Herod king of the Jews; it is probable, that the power of punishing capitally such crimes as concerned the Jewish nation, and against which their law denounced death, had not been wholly taken away from them, though it was clogged with many limitations. But as for crimes by which the tranquillity of the commonwealth was disturbed, they came under the cognizance of the civil power, and consequently the Roman governor punished such crimes according to the laws of the Empire. Probably, they might have an eye to this regulation when they said, 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death,' i. e. any one whose crimes are of a political nature, who stirs up sedition, and endeavours to alienate the subjects from their obedience to the Roman emperor. For these were the points they insisted on, when Pilate enquired into the grounds of their accusation. According to their own law, they might have stoned Christ, as they had declared him a blasphemer; that being the usual punishment of blasphemy. But these conscientious persons were now afraid, that the stones might recoil on their own heads; for it appears from St. Luke, that, sometime before, (Luke xx. 6.) they had been afraid of being stoned by the people. Therefore to prevent the tumult, which they apprehended would be the consequence of stoning the blessed Jesus, it was thought more advisable to make Pilate the instrument for the execution of the sentence. But all these circumstances did not come to pass fortuitously; for,

Fifthly, The counsel of God in this event is pointed out by St. John, who adds, (John xviii. 32.) 'That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake signifying what death he should die.' God, in his eternal decrees, had appointed that the redemption of the world should be wrought by the death of the Cross. This had not only been predicted by the prophets, but declared by Christ him-

self; (Matth. xx. 19. xxvi. 2. John xii. 32.) for he had plainly told his disciples, that he was to be delivered up to the Gentiles, and to be crucified. This declaration of the Lord Jesus, that his sacred person was not to suffer immediately by them, tied up the hands of the Jewish rulers, by whom that painful sort of punishment was not inflicted. St. John makes this observation for the confirmation of our faith; and shews how wisely the counsel of God directed every particular circumstance of our Saviour's passion, amidst such a medley of intricate proceedings carried on by Jews and Gentiles.

We shall conclude this consideration with the following practical observations.

1. The most profane and impious are usually possessed with the strongest assurance of their own infallibility.

These unrighteous Judges were of the number of those liars described by the Psalmist, who go astray from the womb; (Psalm lviii. 3.) yet in their trial of Christ, they fancied themselves invested with a certain infallibility of judging aright, and thought, like the enemies of the Prophet, that 'the law should not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise,' (Jer. xviii. 18.) This privilege of infallibility is not only arrogantly claimed by the Pope, whose extravagant pride would be thought above committing any error, or being subject to any mistake in his decrees; but the most abandoned men also frequently pretend to the same unerring judgment. How few, indeed, are there, who will own that they have acted amiss, or committed a crime? Every one, though his guilt be as glaring as the noon-day, is for justifying, or at least excusing, his actions. This is a depravity which added to the sufferings of Christ, who was condemned by such hypocritical judges. Here let us enter into ourselves, and consider whether we also are blinded with such a perverse self-love, as to ac-

count every thing we do right and just, though it be at the same time directly contrary to God's word. Let us humbly acknowledge this sinful conceit of the rectitude of our own actions, which is one of the greatest impediments to a true repentance and sincere conversion. Let us, with holy Job, 'lay our hand to our mouth, and cease from justifying ourselves before God:' Let us seek the forgiveness of this corrupt principle by the blood of Christ, and open our hearts to the influences of his spirit.

2. That he, who had fulfilled all righteousness, should suffer himself to be sentenced to die as a malefactor, is an unspeakable comfort to those who, in their consciences, know themselves to be evil-doers.

The benevolent Son of God, who hitherto 'had gone about doing good,' (Acts x. 38.) and of whom the people, with just acclamations of applause, had said, 'He has done all things well,' (Mark vii. 37.) here permits himself to be brought before the judge as a malefactor and to suffer by the sword of the civil power. Never would this surprising event have come to pass, had not our sins been the occasion of it. The human race was sunk into such an abyss of depravation, that God, 'when he looked down from heaven, found not one that did good, no not one.' (Psalm xiv. 3.) Thus should we all have been brought as malefactors before the judgment-seat of God, and sentenced to eternal death. But the only-begotten, the beloved Son of the Father, here stood in the place of evil-doers, and bore the shame and punishment due to their sins, that we might be acquitted at the tribunal of God, and be put in a capacity of doing good, and avoiding every evil work. Whosoever therefore is convinced that he has hitherto been an evil-doer; and is sincerely grieved and heartily sorry for his misdoings, let him believe on him, who, for his sake, was numbered among

the transgressors ; and let him give himself up to be governed by his holy spirit. But woe to those who will continue in their evil doings ! for what can they expect but the just sentence of the supreme Judge of the world, ‘ Depart from me, ye that work iniquity !’ Matth. vii. 23.)

3. Hypocrites generally bring an odium on the true religion.

We have already observed what an ironical answer Pilate returned the Jews, ‘ Take ye him and judge him according to your law :’ As if he had said, You make such a boast of your law, as if it was more perfect than the laws of all other nations ; but if your law allows of putting a man to death, before it hears what he has to say for himself, our Roman law is far more preferable, which admits of no such unjust practices. Thus what St. Paul says of the Jews was here verified, ‘ Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God ? for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you,’ (Rom. ii. 23.) The law, which God was pleased to give to the Jews, by no means permitted that any should be condemned without a fair trial ; nay, a capital sentence could not be passed on a criminal upon the deposition of one single witness, (Deut. xvii. 6. xix. 15.) Hence Nicodemus asks this question : ‘ Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth ?’ But as the Jews, in this instance, importunately urge Pilate to order Jesus to be crucified without any previous examination ; this raised in him a suspicion that their law allowed of such an iniquitous proceeding. This is always the conclusion that is drawn by the world from the behaviour of hypocrites ; who cast a blemish on true religion, by making a strong outward profession of it, without ever obeying its divine precepts from the heart. This sin is the more dreadful as it generally gives great offence by casting an odium on the true professors of

religion, and causes the way of the Lord to be evil spoken of; and therefore we ought to detest and abhor such hypocritical practices.

4. The providence of God, which over-ruled the circumstances that attended our blessed Saviour's passion, likewise directs whatever befalls us in life and death.

The enemies of Christ could not move a step farther, than the divine providence permitted them. They could not act just as their malice prompted them; but all the circumstances of our blessed Lord's trial were directed by the predetermined wise counsel, and immutable decree of God. In vain did they endeavour at Nazareth to precipitate the blessed Jesus down the rock, (Luke iv. 29.) in vain did the impious Jews attempt to stone him; (John viii. 59.) and in vain was it that Pilate said, 'Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.' The manner of our Saviour's death was exactly to correspond with the predictions of the prophets, and the previous declarations of the Lord Jesus himself. Satan and his engines in this whole affair acted, indeed according to the impulse of their own wicked and malicious minds; yet the divine wisdom so restrained, guided, and conducted, every part of this important transaction agreeably to the unchangeable purpose of God. Hence many things fell out contrary to the designs and wishes of the enemies of Christ. It is therefore said in Scripture, 'Truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined,' (Luke xxii. 22.) The same providence which accompanied our blessed Saviour from his birth to his death, will also direct all contingences through life for our good, and be our guide unto death, if we will but entirely resign ourselves up to God's disposal. Let us therefore cease from intruding on God's government, and commit all our ways to him only; and then we shall happily experience, that every thing happens here be-

low, not according to the resolutions of our enemies, but according to the determination of eternal wisdom and infinite love.

THE PRAYER.

AND now, O faithful and ever-living God, blessed be thy holy name for permitting thy beloved Son to fall into the hands of wicked men, who led him as an evil-doer before unrighteous judges, that sentence of death might be pronounced on him. Give us, we beseech thee, such an edifying knowledge of the mysteries of impiety and wickedness which attended this great event, that all of us may from it draw those benefits which are necessary to their respective circumstances. Bless that part of thy sacred word which we have now discussed : imprint on all our hearts the important truths that have been drawn from it ; and by thy good spirit, remind us again of them at a proper season. Grant this for Jesus Christ's sake our mediator and advocate. Amen.



CONSIDERATION V.

THE FIRST EXAMINATION OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR ; BEFORE THE CIVIL TRIBUNAL OF PONTIUS PILATE ; THE ROMAN GOVERNOR.

‘ AND Jesus stood before the governor. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king. Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews ? Jesus answered him, sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me ? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew ? thine own nation, and the chief Priests have delivered thee unto me : What hast thou done,’ (Matth. xxvii. 11. Mark xv. 2. Luke xxiii. 2, 3. John xviii. 33, 34, 35.)

In these words we have an account of the first enquiry into our Saviour's cause before the civil tribunal of Pontius Pilate ; and herein we may observe,

First, the charge preferred against him by his enemies.

Secondly, The behaviour of the Judge.

I. As to the charge preferred by our blessed Lord's enemies, it is said, ' And Jesus stood before the governor. And they began to accuse him, saying, We have found this fellow perverting the nation, &c.

At first, the enemies of Christ were displeased with Pilate, because he did not immediately believe their assertion, that Jesus was guilty, and that he should take upon him to enquire into the nature of the accusation brought against him. But when they found, that the affair was not likely to come to so speedy an issue as they expected, they were under a necessity of urging their accusation against Jesus in the most pressing manner. Here we are to observe,

First, the person accused,

Secondly, The accusation brought against him.

The person accused is thus described : ' And Jesus stood before the governor,' After Pilate, at the request of the Jews, was gone out of the hall of judgment to confer with them, they presented Jesus to him bound as a malefactor. Thus he, who is to judge the quick and the dead, here stood before his judge. He who, but a little before, had said to the high Priest, ' Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God,' (Luke xxii. 69.) here stands before Pilate as a criminal. At such an immense price has grace been purchased for us, that we might stand acquitted before the awful tribunal of God. A person of such exalted, such a glorious character, and transcendent merit, permitted himself to be confronted with malicious accusers before an unrighteous judge, that we might obtain boldness to

stand before the righteous judge, and our accusers be ashamed and confounded.

However, St. Matthew, by these words, 'Jesus stood before the governor,' intended not only to denote the outward posture of our blessed Saviour's body, but also the inward frame and disposition of his mind. When Christ was in the garden of Gethsemane praying to his heavenly Father, he prostrated himself before him on his face, in order to obtain favour for us backsliders, by his lowly and filial humiliation. But here, though it was the first time he appeared before his temporal judge, we read of no prostrations, no tears or lamentations, no intreaties for mercy, nor supplications to spare his life; but he stood firm, serene, and undaunted, as one who was perfectly conscious of the justice of his cause and assured of the divine assistance. How strange and unaccountable must this spectacle have appeared, that the king of Israel should stand like a criminal before a heathen governor, and that the Creator of all things, who from eternity is highly exalted above all, should stand in this contemptible manner before his creature? But all this was long before known to the Lord Jesus, by his omniscience. Hence our blessed Lord shewed in this instance a wonderful presence of mind; and by his majestic firmness, set his wavering judge an example that he also should stand unmoved as a rock, and not suffer his resolution to be shaken, like a reed, by the breath of popular clamours, and the impetuous cries of his malicious enemies. This is the representation given us by the Evangelist of the person accused,

The accusation urged against our blessed Saviour is related by St. Luke: and therein we shall consider,

1. The purport of the charge. And,
2. The manner in which it was preferred.
 1. The substance of the accusation was this:
'We found this fellow, say they, perverting the na-

tion, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king.' These words seem to contain a three-fold crime, with which our blessed Saviour is charged by his enemies.

The first is, that he perverts and seduces the people, drawing them away from the ancient Mosaic religion, and perplexing their minds by his confused and false doctrine.

The second crime charged on our blessed Lord is, that he forbids the Jews to pay tribute to Cæsar, and consequently alienates the minds of the Jewish people from their obedience to the Roman emperor, whose subjects they were.

The third crime with which our blessed Saviour is accused by the chief Priests is, That he gives himself out to be the Messiah, and the king of the Jews.

By the first part of the charge, their design is to represent the Lord Jesus as an Heresiarch, a false prophet, and transgressor of the divine law. By the second crime laid to his charge, they make him to be a promoter of sedition, and a rebellious person that violated the law of nature and nations, which requires every subject to contribute some part of his property to the government, in return for the security he enjoys under the protection of the civil power. By the third part of the accusation, they would set him out as a declared usurper, a transgressor of the Roman law, assuming the title of king of the Jews, to the prejudice of the sovereign of the country, and thus fomenting discord and rebellion in the state.

It appears that the enemies of Christ had very industriously multiplied his pretended crimes, that, in case they should fail in the proof of any one of them, they might have other crimes at hand, on which they might ground another indictment.

However, as Pilate was a civil governor and a lay statesman, who gave himself no concern about the Jewish religion, and consequently would pay little regard to the charge of heresy, it is the more probable

that the whole of their accusation centred in the charge of rebellion. By this, they designed to arraign our blessed Lord as a seditious person, who withdrew the people from their allegiance to the Roman emperor. To this end, they adduced for a proof of it, that he forbade the Jews to pay the imposed tribute to the Roman government, and that he even enjoined them to pay it to him, as being the lawful king of the Jews. They concluded that Pilate would be extremely incensed at this; he being appointed by the Roman emperor to superintend what related to his interest, and to keep a watchful eye over any appearance of sedition or tumult among the Jews. However, all these allegations were a heap of notorious falsities, for which they could bring no manner of proof. This was the substance of the charge brought against our blessed Lord by the malicious Jews.

2. The way and manner, in which they preferred this charge against Jesus, is contained in these words: 'We found this fellow perverting the people.' Thus they couched their accusation in terms, that expressed the most virulent contempt of the sacred person of our Lord, not deigning so much as to mention his name, but saying only 'This fellow;' and likewise the greatest audaciousness and effrontery, 'We found this fellow.' They spoke with such confidence, as if they would be thought to have surprised our Saviour in the very fact, in the actual execution of his seditious designs, or at least, as if upon enquiry and due examination, they had found him notoriously guilty of having carried on rebellious practices. Some are of opinion, that the chief Priests and Elders caused the words contained in the charge, to be proclaimed by a herald before all the people, both in the Jewish and Latin languages, that Pilate, who was a Roman, might be acquainted with the accusation brought against Jesus. If that was the case, the

promulgation of these lies the more exposed their consummate effrontery and hardened consciences.

Hence we may deduce the following doctrines.

1. It is the way of hypocrites to charge the faithful servants of God with those crimes, which they themselves are deeply infected with.

The teachers of the Jews were, at that time, themselves guilty of all the faults which they lay to the charge of our blessed Saviour. They were the persons, who alienated the people from the true religion and service of God, and perverted their minds, by enjoying in its stead the vain traditions and trifling ordinances of men, (Matth. xv. 4.) They were the persons, who by their pernicious doctrines, fomented the seditious inclination of the Jewish people; for they made it a subject of dispute in their synagogues or schools, whether the tribute imposed on them by the Roman emperor was consistent with the freedom of the people of God? Lastly, they were the persons, who instilled into the minds of the people the ideas and expectations of an earthly temporal kingdom of the Messiah, who was to be a puissant prince; and consequently, they themselves were guilty of all the crimes which they laid to the charge of the Lord Jesus.

This is the practice of wicked men, even in the present time. Those who are the most detestable hypocrites, and make the greatest show of sanctity, are most apt to charge those who are sincerely desirous of turning to God, or are already converted, with hypocrisy and dissimulation. The most abandoned sons of darkness, the most flagitious sinners, who veil their enormous crimes from the eye of the world, in order to preserve their credit and reputation usually give the name of dissemblers and hypocrites to persons of real piety and virtue. Those men, who in all things seek their own honour and advantage, are the most virulent in accusing the servants of God of entertaining ambitious and selfish views.

They, whose practices are diametrically opposite to the pattern of the salutary doctrines of Christ and his apostles, make it most their business to charge others with heresy, and arraign them as persons guilty of all kinds of pernicious errors. They whose affections are entirely set upon this world, and whose minds are engrossed by avarice, are loudest in their complaints of the avarice and dishonesty of others, &c. Thus was this depravity of the human heart likewise to shew itself, and be made manifest in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. The mediator even felt the effects of his corruption of human nature on his sacred person, that by these painful sensations, he might acquire for us the remission of dissimulation and hypocrisy, if duly repented of in time.

2. The most innocent and the irreproachable behaviour is not sufficient to secure a good man against the envenomed darts of calumny and false accusations.

What could our blessed Saviour do more than he had done, to avoid the least suspicion of rebellion and seditious practices? When the people were for laying hold of him, in order to make him a king, as it were by force, he fled from them, (John vi. 15.) Nay, he even paid the tribute money for himself and Peter; (Matth. xvii. 17.) and when, about four days before his passion, he was asked, Whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or not, he returned this plain answer, 'Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's.' Even his very enemies could not make the least exception against this wise decision in so ensnaring a dispute; but were astonished at his answer, and went away without saying a word, (Luke xx 26.) But all this caution was not sufficient to secure our blessed Saviour from the false imputation of entertaining rebellious designs; for, notwithstanding all these appearances of the most resigned submission to the

civil power, his enemies now charge him with perverting the people, forbidding them to pay tribute, and setting himself up for a king. If the great captain of our salvation, our ever-glorious Head was thus basely treated, his members can certainly expect no better treatment from his and their inveterate enemies. Therefore, be of good courage, all ye that are determined to follow Christ as your leader, and to walk innocently and unblameably amidst a perverse and wicked generation among whom ye live! Be assured, that all these precautions will not absolutely secure you against calumny, lies, and slanderous imputations: However, think not such treatment strange or uncommon; but comfort yourselves, since your blessed Chief was thus also treated, and be content in this also to be made like unto the first-born among many brethren, whom Christ will translate into his glorious kingdom.

3. Whoever supposes that, when all manner of evil is spoken against the good and virtuous, there must be some ground for such accusations, is disposed to condemn Christ and his innocent members.

It is a common practice with nominal Christians, when any ill reports are spread abroad to the prejudice of pious men, to give out that there must be something in it; that people would not otherwise talk so freely and openly; that they are things which would have never come into any one's head to invent; that what all the world says must be true, &c. On this the spirit of slander relies, and industriously spreads all kinds of false reports, and such as often have not a shadow of probability, well knowing that there will be people either credulous or spiteful enough to believe and propagate them. Thus it throws calumnies and lies about the more boldly, being confident that some will stick on, and sully the reputation of the envied person. In the present instance, all the Jewish rulers openly de-

famed and calumniated the blessed Jesus, who was the most innocent among the children of men. They openly accused him of aiming at the regal power, and forbidding to pay tribute to Cæsar. But was there any shadow of truth in this accusation? Was it not a most flagrant lie, hatched in their own brains? O that men would more attentively reflect on the wise saying of the son of Sirah: Many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale, (Eccles. xix 15.) The source of this depravity is nothing else but enmity against Christ and his members. Let us therefore examine ourselves, and ask our own hearts, whether we are inclined to believe any evil report concerning a great but wicked man, whose favour has been of service to us? Alas! in such a case, we are far from being over-credulous, and we withhold our assent while there is but the least appearance of truth against it, to keep us in countenance. How comes it to pass then, that we are so ready to believe the very worst calumnies, and the most scandalous reports of the faithful servants and followers of Christ? In such persons is verified that saying of Solomon: 'A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue,' (Prov. xvii. 4.)

4. The sufferings of the blessed Jesus, in patiently bearing false accusations, is a spring of great comfort to his faithful servants.

For by this part of his sufferings, Christ has, first, expiated our fall, and the depravity propagated in us from our first parents. We have naturally an evil refractory heart, which is full of rebellion against God and our lawful superiors. We have not only in our minds turned aside from God to satan; but have, as it were, thrown the whole creation into disorder, and subjected it to vanity, (Rom. viii. 2.) We have refused to pay the tribute of gratitude and obedience, which we owe to our indulgent Creator, and are likewise inclined to shake off the yoke of allegiance to the civil powers, and to defraud them of

the tribute due to them, (Rom. xiii. 7.) by all manner of illegal means, and clandestine practices. We have seated our obstinate self-will on the royal throne ; we have paid homage to it, and refused the fidelity and submission due to our lawful and sovereign Lord. We all, by nature, hanker after greatness ; we are inflamed with ambition and inflated with pride, and would rather command others than be subject to lawful authority. All these our falsely accused mediator has expiated, if we sincerely repent of them, and believe in his name. He has also, by patiently bearing these false accusations and unjust calumnies, atoned for our unjust complaints against God, and the dispensations of his providence.

On the other hand, he has, secondly, acquired for us an exemption from the guilt charged on us by our malicious accuser and inveterate enemy, satan, who will bring innumerable accusations against us, some true, and some false, before the tribunal of God. Now that the tempter, and at the same time accuser, of mankind may be disappointed, Christ has suffered the waves of false accusations to pass over his head, while he stood unmoved as a rock, amidst their foaming rage and boisterous fury.

He has, thirdly, by this part of his sufferings, sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, who are often exclaimed against and calumniated by the children of the world, (especially by those of Herodian minds, who in fact exalt the civil power above God himself) as a rebellious, turbulent, and seditious set of men ; because they cannot blindly submit to the vain ordinances of men, in matters which affect their own consciences and the honour of God, but adhere to the apostles rule, viz, ' We ought to obey God rather than men.' Upon such occasions, they must expect to be accused, that they pervert the people ; that they trample on the authority, and despise the edicts of the magistrate, and disturb the public

tranquility, (compare 1 Kings xviii. 17. Jer. xxxviii. 4. Acts xxiv. 5.)

Let us therefore give thanks and praise to our faithful Saviour and Redeemer, for submitting to such false accusations, and by that means opening for us such an abundant source of comfort. But let us shew forth our gratitude, not only in mere words, but also in a willing readiness to undergo any calumny or false accusation for his sake. On the contrary, let us be extremely cautious, that we neither raise nor countenance any false report against others, nor, by seditious and rebellious practices, bring a reproach on the peaceable doctrines of the gospel of Christ. Having thus treated on the accusation charged on our blessed Lord by his enemies, we now proceed to consider,

II. The behaviour of his judge. It seems he conferred with the party accused: 'Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews?' In this behaviour of Pilate, there are many things which deserve commendation: He is to be commended for observing that equitable rule of hearing both sides. He is to be commended, because he examines into the affair himself, and does not shift off the trouble by appointing others to report the case to him. Lastly, He is to be commended for examining our blessed Lord by himself, in the judgment-hall, about the charge alleged against him, that every thing might be conducted the more peaceably, and with greater privacy and order; and that Jesus might the sooner be induced to confess the whole truth to him. So far, indeed, Pilate is to be commended, and his conduct is to be approved. However after all this parade of impartiality and justice, the innocent is condemned to suffer. This has been the case in the trial of several martyrs. The indictments were usually read, the parties accused were examined, and allowed to make their defence;

but generally they were to be very short in their apologies; for, in such cases, the world is soon out of patience. At last, however, after many interrogations, ensnaring questions, and pertinent answers, they were led to the stake: And no wonder, since the disciple is not above his master.

Moreover, in this discourse which Pilate had with Christ, we shall take notice, first, of Pilate's question, secondly, of our blessed Lord's question to Pilate, and thirdly, of Pilate's answer to Jesus.

First, Pilate's question is comprehended in these words, 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' Thus the governor insisted on the last article of the accusation, as all the rest were included in it. He could not but know that the Jews expected a Messiah, who, as a king and conqueror, was to deliver them from all foreign dominion, to subject other nations to them, and to procure them a superabundant affluence of all earthly blessings. Of this expectation of the Jews, as he had now been for some years governor of Judea, he could not be ignorant. He was therefore for knowing, in the first place, whether Jesus was that Messiah, or triumphant Prince, whom the Jews expected; since the truth of the other parts of the accusation depended on the proof of this point. For if our blessed Saviour had owned that he was a temporal king of the Jews, Pilate would have thought it very natural for him to use some endeavours to gain the affections of his subjects, and that he would consequently attempt to alienate their minds, and withdraw their allegiance from the Roman emperor; and then the refusal of paying the customary tribute to the Roman government, would have followed of course.

It appears also that Pilate put this question to Jesus with some degree of surprise, 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' As if he had said, It is what one would little think from thy outward appearance, thy bonds, thy fetters, &c. it is what I should have never ima-

gined. This, indeed, is generally the way of the great and wise of this world. They judge of the kingdom of Jesus Christ from its external figure ; and as they find in it no outward pomp or splendor, no worldly state, they are so blinded with pride, that they despise and revile it.

But what an astonishing abasement is this, that the King of Kings, of whom all monarchs hold their temporal crowns, should here submit his regal dignity to be called in question ! This is what the sovereigns of the earth, of all things are the least able to bear ; for to dispute their right to the crown is, as it were, touching the apple of their eye. On the contrary, with what humility of mind does the Lord of Lords here suffer himself to be questioned on this point ! This voluntary humiliation of the Lord of Glory should shame our arrogance, and be a powerful preservative against pride, and immoderate ambition. So much did it cost our blessed Redeemer to acquire for us, miserable slaves of satan, the honour of being made kings and priests to God, his Heavenly father ! Unexampled condescension ! Adorable love !

Secondly, Before this question of Pilate was answered by the Lord Jesus, he, in return, calmly puts another question to Pilate in these words : ‘ Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me ? ’ As if he had said, have you hitherto observed in me or my behaviour in Jerusalem, any thing which could raise in you a well-grounded suspicion, that I attempt to make myself king of Judea, or to seduce the people from their obedience to the Romans ? Or, have others who are my enemies informed you of this without giving any proof of their allegation ; and by their exalted character so far imposed on your judgment, that you are not averse from believing it out of complaisance to them ? This seems to be the meaning of this question, put by our blessed Saviour to the Roman governor.

By this question, our blessed Lord gives his judge a tacit hint, that he does not scrupulously adhere to the rules of equity and justice. For, in the first place it was not very just in Pilate, to proceed to interrogate the prisoner on the bare accusation of the Jews, unsupported by any legal proofs, and without once asking them, on what they grounded their charge against him. For if merely to accuse a person be sufficient to convict him, who can ever be safe, and secure from malice? It was likewise a wrong proceeding in Pilate to refer to the declaration of the party accused the truth of a fact, which ought to have been proved by witnesses; for, in the common method of proceeding, no party can be an evidence in his own cause. Lastly, Pilate acted amiss in entering upon the trial of the pretended criminal, in compliance to the desire of his enemies, before he had a right knowledge of the nature of the charge, and had ordered the accusers explicitly to tell him, what sort of a king the party accused pretended to be. Now as Pilate acted wrong in so many respects at the very beginning of the examination, our blessed Saviour here means to give him a hint of the nature and duty of his office.

By this double question, our blessed Lord also endeavours to clear up the ambiguity of Pilate's question, viz. 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' and by that means, opens a way for the good confession he afterwards made concerning the true nature of his kingdom. The Messiah had, indeed, in the writings of the Prophets, been ever represented as the king of Israel, 'Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, (Isaiah xlv. 6) The King of Israel, even the Lord is in the midst of thee,' (Zaph. iii. 15.) Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold, thy King cometh unto thee, &c.' (Zac. ix. 9.) Hence it was that even the eastern Magi, or wise men from the east, when they enquired after our Saviour, said, 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews?'

(Matth. ii. 2.) But Pilate, who was a stranger to the writings of the Prophets, could certainly by the title of king of the Jews understand no other than a temporal sovereign. Jesus therefore enquires, whether Pilate spake this of himself, and gave him the title of king of the Jews in a political sense? or, whether the Jews had suggested this to him, who were under the highest obligation to form their idea of the king of the Jews according to the prophetic writings, and consequently whether he meant a spiritual king?

Now our blessed Lord, by giving Pilate a hint to keep closer to the rules of justice and equity, gave a proof of his undaunted firmness and magnanimity; and by his endeavour to clear the question from confusion, he gave a proof of his divine wisdom; for he first removes all obscurity and ambiguity from the question, before he returns an answer to it. If he had directly answered in the negative to the question, art thou the king of the Jews? it would have looked, as if he was not that king of Israel, whose coming had been predicted in scripture by the Prophets; and if he had, without adding any illustration, answered in the affirmative, it might have been concluded that he had set up for a temporal king of the Jews, by which he would have unnecessarily irritated Pilate. To prevent both of these bad consequences, before our blessed Saviour makes his confession, he is for settling the right sense and meaning of the question put to him by Pilate. Hereupon follows,

Thirdly, Pilate's answer to our Saviour's question is this, 'Am I a Jew? thine own nation, and the chief Priests have delivered thee unto me: What hast thou done?' By which,

1. Pilate shews that he was displeased at the question which Jesus had put to him, by these words Am I a Jew? As if he had said, What have I, who am a statesman, to do with the wranglings of the Jews among themselves about religion? It is no concern

of mine to know what king they may expect ! I have more important business on my hands than to read their books, and enquire into such superstitions. In this question also appears both his contempt of the Jewish nation, which the Jews had partly brought on themselves by their profligate manner of living ; and likewise his contempt of the Jewish and true religion. It was also accompanied with a good deal of pride and haughtiness, for Pilate looked upon it as a great scandal to be a Jew ; and that Christ, who was a Jew, should have the boldness to put such a question to him, was what he could not digest. These faults are still too frequently seen in many politicians and statesmen, who look upon the most important and fundamental truths of the Christian religion, as nothing but theological altercations ; and, under the pretence of being no divines, speak of religion with an indifferent levity, and believe just according to their own fancy and ignorance of divine things.

2. Pilate here discovers those who had put him upon asking this question, by saying, 'Thine own people and the chief Priests have delivered thee unto me.' As if he had said, For my part, thou mightest have gone all over Judea, preaching and teaching, without any molestation from me. But thine own nation, and the most venerable and learned among thy people, viz. the chief Priests, who themselves expect a king and Messiah, have brought thee hither, and accuse thee of having given thyself out to be a king.

3. Upon this, Pilate asks, 'What hast thou done?' Thou must, at least, have dropped some words, which have given a handle for such an accusation ; or thou must have very much offended the people, and by some flagitious crime or other, drawn their hatred on thyself.

Thus Pilate thought that there must be some cause behind the curtain, quite different from what was alleged against Jesus, which he was artfully for

coming at by this question, what hast thou done ? The answer, which our blessed Lord made to this last question, we shall discuss at large in the following consideration, in the next volume. In the mean time, from the words which we have explained, we may learn the following truths.

1. Christ's magnanimity and prudence, in his behaviour towards Pilate, is a great comfort to his suffering members.

Pilate had here before him a person of transcendent dignity, who was sensible of his spotless innocence and the justice of his cause. The prisoner therefore might justly presume to put the Roman governor, who was his judge, in mind of his station ; to instruct him in the observance of the rules of justice and equity ; and to give him to understand, that instead of being imposed upon by an ambiguous charge, he ought to have taken care to be rightly informed of the nature and true meaning of the accusation brought before him. All these intimations proceeded from the spirit of fortitude and strength, with which the human nature of the Lord Jesus was abundantly anointed. Though Christ, in this particular, has an infinite pre-eminence above all his companions ; (Psa. xlv. 8.) yet he will graciously impart to his persecuted members as much of this magnanimity, and undaunted firmness, which was here displayed to the Roman governor, as he sees proper for their several conditions. Let no Christian, therefore, however timorous and fearful he is by nature, despond, and say within himself, Alas ! should persecution arise for the sake of truth, if it should be my case to be brought before magistrates, councils, and courts of judicature, to give an answer of the reason of the hope that is in me, I am afraid, that I shall greatly prejudice the cause of God. I say, let none give way to such desponding thoughts ; for Jesus Christ, who can make intrepid lions of his

most timid sheep, will, at the hour of trial, communicate to them as much of his fortitude and holy confidence, as they stand in need of. Hence women and children in the most violent persecutions, have declared the truth to tyrants in such an undaunted manner, that the remembrance of it has stuck by them during their whole lives. Thus the firmness and magnanimity of our Saviour will be always a source of comfort to his faithful servants.

But no less comfortable is the consummate wisdom and prudence that shone forth in this pattern of perfection, who did not suffer himself to be drawn into the subtle snare of perplexity, by an ambiguous question; but before he answered it, he cleared up its obscurity and equivocation, and used the utmost caution not to prejudice the truth. The spirit of this world is very industrious and artful in his endeavours to perplex and confound our ideas of the essential truths of religion, that he may afterwards take the advantage of our doubts and perplexities. In this work, none do him more service than those learned men who, by their abstracted notions, and scholastic subtilities, to perplex and obscure the clearest truths, that others of less sagacity are entirely at a loss how to go about to unravel them. This is a most wretched employment indeed: which the prince of darkness, as he is the greatest gainer by it, will one day recompence according to its deserts. But Jesus Christ the eternal word who, at the first creation, caused the light to shine out of darkness, accounts it a part of his prophetic and mediatorial office, to extricate truth from perplexity, and to reduce to order that confusion which has been introduced by designing men and scholastic dreamers. It is well for us that we have an all-wise mediator, who is made wisdom to us, since we have to do with a subtle enemy, who has a thousand ways to circumvent us; who would take advantage of our simplicity,

did not the watchful eye of the blessed Jesus prevent us from falling into dangerous perplexities and embarrassments. This is a singular comfort to persecuted Christians, who in their examinations are often vexed with intricate and ambiguous questions ; since they may be assured, that Jesus Christ the captain of their salvation, who was himself tempted in the same manner, has not only a compassionate tenderness for his conflicting soldiers, but will also give them words and wisdom ; (Luke xxi 15.) and will also, as it were, put a clue into their hands, which will guide them out of the labyrinth of equivocal and perplexing examinations.

2. It is the duty of the followers of Christ to avoid all appearances of evil.

Our Saviour could with all boldness ask Pilate, whether he taxed him with rebellious and seditious designs of himself, or whether his accusers had whispered such things in his ears ? This his undaunted firmness was the effect of his innocence ; for he had avoided every appearance of evil. By this behaviour, he gave us an admirable pattern for our compliance with these words of his apostle, ‘Abstain from all appearance of evil,’ (1. Thes. v. 22.) Many are the malignant eyes that narrowly watch every step of the children of God, and put the worst construction on their actions. Therefore it behoves them not only carefully to avoid all manner of vice, but even the appearance of what may be construed to their disadvantage. But to this end, it is requisite to preserve a very tender conscience (which, like the pupil of the eye, is hurt by the least atom of sin) a constant self-denial, and a continual watchfulness over our inward thoughts and outward demeanor. These precautions must also be accompanied with incessant prayer, that the omniscient God who counteth all our steps will establish all our goings by his sacred word. But whoever sets about this arduous task, relying merely

on his own strength, wisdom, and prudence, will, before he is aware, meet with a grievous fall.

5. It is a grievous offence to the rest of the world, when truth and godliness are persecuted by those persons, who ought to countenance them.

Pilate, as a statesman, was here offended, that the Jewish Priests should deliver up to him their Messiah and King, and desire that he should be put to death. By this proceeding of the Jews, the heathens were hardened in their hatred against Jesus, for they saw him persecuted by his own people, among whom he was born. Woe to the world likewise because of his offence! But happy are they who are the innocent objects of such unrighteous proceedings, since the blessed Jesus has sanctified this kind of suffering in his own adorable person, and has declared that theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

4. The great and wise of this world cannot bear to hear instruction from Christ and his members.

How was Pilate displeased when the Lord Jesus, instead of returning an immediate answer, by a discreet question gave him an intimation, that he ought not suffer himself to be imposed upon by his enemies, and to be prepossessed by their equivocal accusations. As the same spirit of resentment against discreet intimations still continues among those, who have the power in their hands, and have not yet been modelled into gentleness and humility by the spirit of Christ, whatever they do, they think must be right; and they look upon the most humble and mild remonstrances as an affront offered to their dignity. The privileges of princes are a much more pleasing topic to them, than the duties incumbent on that high station; and it is with a reluctant impatience that they hear themselves put in mind of their duty, though it be from the word of God. Nay, though it is a general maxim in the world that one is not to put up with an offence of

any kind; yet they think Christians are to be harrassed and insulted by them, without so much as opening their mouths. Thus it must be for a time; but the scene will at last be shifted, and a day is at hand when the saints shall judge the world, (Cor. vi. 2.)

5. Every Christian, in considering all the circumstances of our Saviour's passion, has sufficient cause to put this question to himself, what hast thou done?

Of the blessed Jesus it is said in scripture, 'He did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth; (Isa. liii. 9.) he went about doing good,' (Acts x. 38.)

The malefactor, who was crucified with our blessed Lord, says of him, 'This man hath done nothing amiss,' (Luke xxiii. 41.) Yea, Christ himself says in the face of the enraged multitude, 'Many good works have I shewed you from my Father: for which of those works do ye stone me?' (John x. 32.) But when any of us shall ask his own heart, what hast thou done? What a multitude of sinful actions will then present themselves to his affrighted conscience, which are recorded in God's book of remembrance! now, amidst the terrors that surround us, when we find we are such miserable sinners, and have been so frequently guilty of transgressing the commandments of God, let us not forget, during this salutary contrition, to lift up the eye of faith to Jesus the immaculate Lamb of God, concerning whom Pilate himself cries out 'Why [would you crucify him?] what evil hath he done,' (Luke xxiii. 22.) The innocence and merits of Christ must henceforth be the asylum, to which we may fly for refuge from the complaints and accusations of our consciences. This is the way to make a beneficial application to ourselves of this part of our Saviour's sufferings.

THE PRAYER.

WE thank thee, O gracious and merciful God, because thou hast caused an account of the arraignment of our Saviour before the tribunal of the Gentiles to be inserted in thy holy word, for our edification and comfort. Grant that every one of us, according to the circumstances in which he may find himself, may rightly apply it to his own benefit and consolation. Be pleased to convince those sinners who are accused by their own consciences of their wretched and dangerous condition, that the sense of their guilt may excite in them a godly sorrow, and a sincere repentance and amendment of life. Manifest to thy faithful servants the mystery of their Saviour's innocence, that they may find abundant comfort in it under all the faults and imperfections of which they are conscious that they are guilty, and by his merits silence all the accusations of satan and their own conscience. Bless therefore this part of thy word to our souls, that it may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy name. Amen.

END OF VOLUME ONE.





